Commentary
February 2001

Bush, Missile Defense, and the Critics

Frank J. Gaffney, Jr.

Who Needs Medical Ethics?

Sally Satel and Christine Stolba

Mumbling Monuments

Michael J. Lewis

Mistaking One Man for Another—A Story

Ellen Geist

At Play with Susan Sontag

Carol Iannone

Jazz & Its Explainers

Terry Teachout

CONTROVERSY

Facing China

Aaron L. Friedberg & Critics

Books in Review

Francis Fukuyama • Gabriel Schoenfeld • Michael Kimmage
Jonathan Marks • Richard Brookhiser

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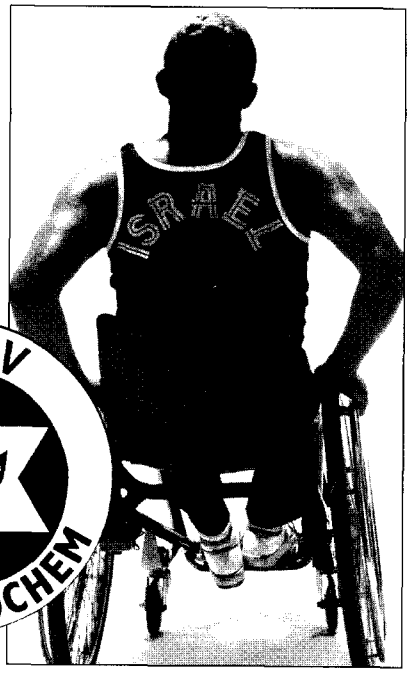

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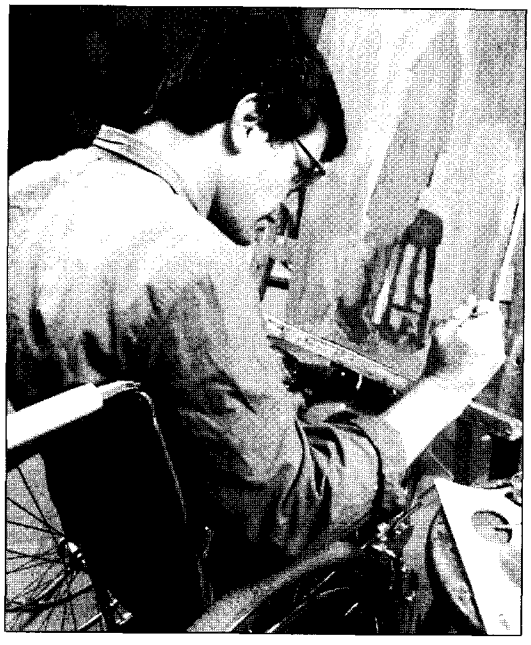

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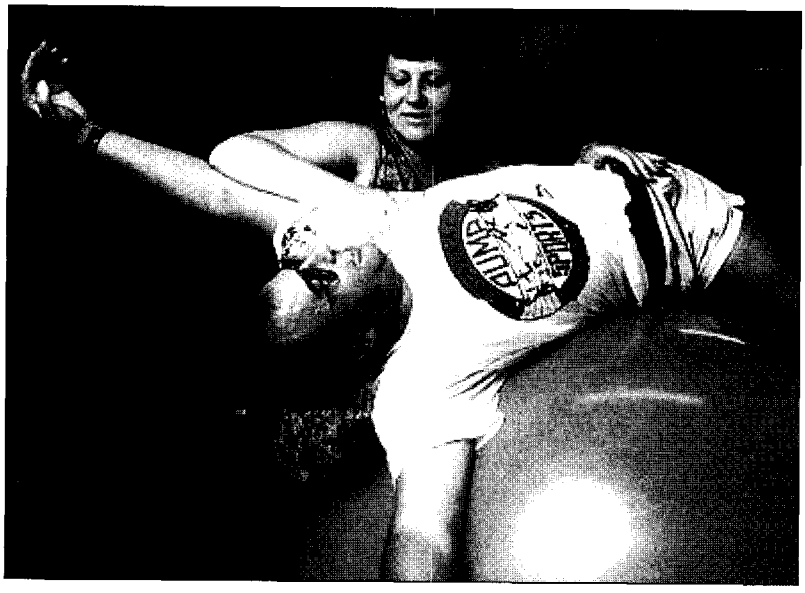

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Commentary
February 2001

Letters from Readers

Defending Islam

To the Editor:

In his inexplicable and intellectually dishonest analysis of the American Muslim community ["Are Muslim Americans Victimized?," November 2000], Daniel Pipes writes that the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) devotes its resources "to promoting the idea of Muslim victimization" and that people of other faiths should not "fall for, let alone . . . endorse, spurious charges of [anti-Muslim] 'discrimination and harassment.'"

Mr. Pipes bases his claim on a long list of incidents in which American Muslims received recognition, won rights to religious accommodation, or successfully challenged negative stereotyping and defamation. The fact that corporations or the courts favorably addressed these incidents is used as evidence to bolster his thesis.

Unfortunately, Mr. Pipes forgot to mention that almost all of the several dozen incidents listed were resolved thanks to the intervention of CAIR. None of these victories for Muslims came as easily as Mr. Pipes would suggest. Some followed months, or even years, of public-relations campaigns and legal challenges. If Mr. Pipes had revealed the key role CAIR played in each case, readers would contradictorily be led to believe, on the one hand, that CAIR does very good work fighting discrimination against American Muslims and, on the other, that Muslims have no need of that good work because they never experienced discrimination in the first place.

Indeed, on previous occasions, some of Mr. Pipes's very statements have led to the discrimination he says does not exist. Following the 1995 terrorist attack on the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, his claims of possible Muslim involvement, along with those of other Islamophobic commentators, helped spark a wave of more than 200 anti-Muslim incidents.

Mr. Pipes claims that the media "treat Islam and Muslims with a truly unique delicacy." But again, he refutes his own argument by listing many instances in which the media and book publishers were less than delicate in their treatment of Islam and Muslims. Mr. Pipes refers to one incident (again resolved with CAIR's intervention) in which a children's book offered what Mr. Pipes calls a "negative treatment" of the Prophet Muhammad, but he fails to tell his readers what that means. In *World Religions: Great Lives*, William Jay Jacobs offered the following description of the Prophet Muhammad:

> During his lifetime he was a man who loved beautiful women, fine perfume, and tasty food. He took pleasure in seeing the heads of his enemies torn from their bodies by the swords of his soldiers. He hated Christians and Jews, poets and painters, and anyone who criticized him. Once he had a Jewish prisoner tortured in order to learn the location of the man's hidden treasure. Then, having uncovered the secret, he had his victim murdered and added the dead man's wife to the collection of women in his harem.

It seems easy to imagine why Muslims would find such a description of their prophet inaccurate and offensive.

Mr. Pipes also has a troubling habit of referring to Islam as "alien" or "exotic," both in this article and in his previous works, explaining at one point that "all immigrants bring exotic customs and attitudes, but Muslim customs are more troublesome than most." Let me preempt Mr. Pipes's inevitable response to this criticism—that he is not talking about "good" Muslims, just bad "Islamists." But

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Muslims view Mr. Pipes's "Islamist" distinction as merely a smokescreen for attacks on anyone who would defend Islam.

IBRAHIM HOOPER
Council on American-Islamic Relations
Washington, D.C.

TO THE EDITOR:

Muslims are free to worship, express their opinions, assemble, and participate in the affairs of society in America more so than in any other nation. But the cases of discrimination outlined by Daniel Pipes are about the struggle for equal opportunity and are not, as he claims, false cries of victimization. In fact, the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC), which Mr. Pipes lists at the end of his article as among those organizations devoting "their resources to promoting the idea of Muslim victimization," regards victimization as alien to its philosophy. MPAC was established to disseminate accurate information about Islam and Muslims to the American public. It has sponsored forums for the purpose of education and creating an atmosphere of mutual understanding. In doing so, MPAC is merely applying lessons learned from other American organizations that have successfully illuminated discrimination against their communities.

Mr. Pipes mentions the refusal of Congressman James Rogan to meet with me. He asserts that the Congressman had "correct grounds" for accusing me of being an "apologist" for terrorism. While Rogan has since personally apologized, Mr. Pipes is exploiting this incident.

Mr. Pipes fails to note another instance of discrimination—the withdrawal of my nomination to the National Commission on Terrorism. This was an illustration of the kind of censorship tactics experienced by many Muslim Americans. Because of my background representing the mainstream Muslim American community, the litmus test of blind support for Israel was applied to me. Since neither I, nor any other legitimate Muslim leader, could bypass such an artificial and inappropriate barrier, we are deemed unable to serve our country. Only those who support Israel unconditionally or who have no stated opinion on the matter need apply.

Interestingly, relations between MPAC and the American Jewish Committee, which publishes COMMENTARY, were positive before this controversy, as is indicated by the following statement from Rabbi James Rudin, then the director of interreligious affairs for the organization, in 1995: "Please know that we look forward to working with you and other like-minded groups in building human bridges of mutual respect and understanding between our two communities."

SALAM AL-MARAYATI
Muslim Public Affairs Council
Washington, D.C.

TO THE EDITOR:

Daniel Pipes is correct to argue that Muslim Americans are not "victims." Nor, contrary to Mr. Pipes, do we perceive ourselves as such.

As Mr. Pipes points out, Muslim Americans are indeed among the most highly educated and affluent American citizens, with more than 52 percent holding graduate degrees and with average gross annual incomes of approximately $69,000. What Mr. Pipes does not mention is that Muslim America, with a population of nearly 8 million, has absolutely no political representation locally, nationally, or internationally. Every American minority—Native Americans, blacks, women, Jews, and Hispanics—is represented in government by the leaders of its community. Even religious groups are represented on political issues. Only Muslim Americans have been denied this primary privilege, guaranteed to every American by the Constitution.

Since Muslim Americans are a diverse community that consists of African Americans, Arabs, Hispanics, Persians, Asians, etc., it may seem that we are already represented. Muslim identity, however, is not a racial but rather a religious identity. Our positions on political issues are informed by our values and beliefs as Muslims.

A few months ago Hillary Clinton returned contributions to her Senate campaign submitted by two prominent Muslims, claiming it was because these gentlemen support Hamas, and therefore support terrorism. We have people within our community who sympathize strongly with Hamas as a political movement within the context and confines of the conflict in Palestine. This support is not tantamount to supporting "terrorism." If it is, then surely those who support Ariel Sharon and Benjamin Netanyahu would also be pushed off the American political scene, since these men have performed acts deemed criminal, and even terrorist, by a good number of both Muslims and non-Muslims.

The men who contributed to Mrs. Clinton's campaign may have controversial views about the situation in Palestine, but they are still good citizens, and they pay taxes (some of which are even sent to support Israel in its fight against the Palestinians). It is not likely that their partisan sentiments on international affairs will damage American democracy, but surely the denial of their right to participate in politics will.

Since 1994 and the airing by PBS of Steven Emerson's documentary, *Jihad in America*, Muslim Americans have been looked at as suspect. Muslims have been detained in American prisons for as long as four years without charge as "national security threats" because their political ideals do not conform. Why are we unraveling the fabric of American representative government simply out of fear of those who hold diverse views?

AHMED YOUSEF
Executive Director
United Association for Studies and Research
Annandale, Virginia

TO THE EDITOR:

Each of Daniel Pipes's anecdotes begins with an act of racism and each ends in a victory for Muslims. Strangely, Mr. Pipes finds only the legal judgment significant, not the racist act that gave rise to the claim. For every unlawful discriminatory act resulting in a judgment against the perpetrator, there are many more that result in an opposite judgment, and still

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thousands of others that are never litigated. This reality is excluded from Mr. Pipes's piece, probably because it conflicts with the image of "flexible" and "open" American institutions that he strains to create.

Mr. Pipes is not merely arguing that Muslim Americans are not victims, a brutally uninteresting point, but rather that there is no justification for the school- and workplace-tolerance policies that Muslim Americans advocate. These are, however, the same policies that many Hindus, Sikhs, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Jews require in order to practice their religions without fear of reprisals from educational institutions and employers.

MICHAEL A. TRONCOSO
Washington, D.C.

TO THE EDITOR:

Daniel Pipes is correct that in an America dominated by moral and cultural relativism, heterogeneous elements in our midst are accepted as exotic and benign and having values worth emulating. But a cursory look at the theology of Muslims and how they have regularly treated Jews, Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, and other religious groups in places where they constitute the dominant culture would be an enlightening, and cautionary, experience for most Americans.

GEORGE E. RUBIN
New York City

TO THE EDITOR:

I read Daniel Pipes's article with the utmost interest, and I completely agree with his refutation of the claim that "discrimination is now part of daily life for American Muslims." Apart from those limited forms of bias to which religious or ethnic minorities are exposed in every part of the world, Muslims in the United States enjoy the full range of religious and political freedoms, which would be simply inconceivable in most of their countries of origin. In fact, many Muslims who are running from dictatorship and oppression naturally see the United States as the country where their aspirations can be satisfied.

Even so, I must add that the Muslim community in the United States does experience victimization, in one respect, though not at the hands of government or the media. Rather they are victims of their "representatives," the leadership of extremist organizations like the Council on American-Islamic Relations, the American Muslim Council, the Islamic Circle of North America, and the Islamic Society of North America, all of which completely distort the image of who Muslims are and of what they stand for.

The vast majority of American Muslims belong to the Sunni confession, while the leaders of these organizations are all Wahhabis, acting only in the interest of the Saudi regime that funds them and determines their projects and programs. The real paradox is that Muslims who live in America have their leadership appointed by the rulers of Saudi Arabia.

Moreover, these organizations that are ready to raise their voices to protest against "discrimination" suffered by American Muslims have never spoken a word to condemn groups like Hamas and Hezbollah that try to legitimize terrorism "in the name of Islam," or to condemn regimes like the Taliban in Afghanistan and Hasan Turabi in Sudan for causing the death of thousands of innocent Muslims. This silence about crimes perpetrated against Muslims, and about crimes perpetrated "in the name of Islam," contributes to the impression that Muslims really do support terrorism.

Finally, the tendency of these organizations to launch hate campaigns against those intellectuals and media operators who denounce and expose their radical agenda only serves to make matters worse.

SHAYKH ABDUL HADI PALAZZI
Director
Cultural Institute of the Italian Islamic Community
Rome, Italy

DANIEL PIPES writes:

Starting almost from the end: It is, of course, Michael A. Troncoso's right to find the point of my article—that Muslim Americans do not suffer from bias—"brutally uninteresting." It is not his right, however, to ascribe to me quite another point—"that there is no justification for . . . school- and workplace-tolerance policies." This is not what I wrote, and I do not agree with it.

I can hardly dispute George E. Rubin: Muslim governments do not treat their religious minorities as Muslims aspire to be treated in the United States. At the same time, this has little relevance to the domestic issue of how Muslim Americans actually fare here.

Now on to the curiously similar letters from leaders of three American organizations (CAIR, MPAC, UASR). Look closely and you will note two commonalities. First, none of them contests my main argument—that Muslim American do not suffer from "discrimination and harassment." Indeed, two of my correspondents, Salam Al-Marayati and Ahmed Yousef, explicitly agree with me on this point. This is good to know, and I now look forward to the day when their organizations cease to tout Muslim victimization.

Second, each of the three letters contains a specific grievance. Ibrahim Hooper complains about me, Salam Al-Marayati complains about his exclusion from the National Commission on Terrorism, and Ahmed Yousef complains about Hillary Clinton's return of campaign money to a pro-Hamas group. As the latter two matters have been much discussed in the national media, I shall confine myself here to the first, which is both more personal and more obscure.

Before defending myself, though, let me note that Mr. Hooper has a history of vituperation and aggressiveness against anyone who opposes his Islamist vision for the United States. In my case, he has been sending out tirades since July 1999; these have landed everywhere from the oped page of the Minneapolis *Star-Tribune* to the hands of street picketers in Washington, D.C. His modus operandi includes name-calling ("intellectually dishonest") and the indiscriminate spewing of anything negative he can find about those he disagrees with, no matter how irrelevant or inaccurate. For example, he located (in a chat room on

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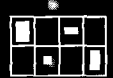

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the Internet) a critique of my writing by a professor of religion at Harvard and widely but erroneously trumpeted this as coming from my Arabic instructor.

Which leads me to Mr. Hooper's specific complaint concerning my response to the April 1995 attack on the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. On at least six occasions, he has quoted a statement I made to *USA Today* on the day of the blast. There I said that the West was

> under attack. People need to understand that this is just the beginning. The fundamentalists are on the upsurge, and they make it very clear that they are targeting us. They are absolutely obsessed with us.

According to Hooper, this statement "helped spark a wave of more than 200 anti-Muslim incidents." In answer, I have three points to make.

(1) It was the FBI, not I, who informed the public that Middle Easterners were the primary suspects behind the Oklahoma City bombing.

(2) In saying that "this is just the beginning," I was referring to assaults by Islamists against Western interests going back to about 1983—the bombings in Beirut and Kuwait, the killing of Americans on airplanes, the World Trade Center explosion of 1993. As a prediction made in 1995, moreover, the statement looks pretty good six years later, after U.S. embassies have been blown up in Tanzania and Kenya, the *U.S.S. Cole* has been attacked, and many assaults on Americans have been narrowly averted.

(3) Mr. Hooper's figure of 200 anti-Muslim incidents after the Oklahoma City bombing is largely a product of his febrile imagination. Presumably he is drawing on a 1995 report by his organization, *Rush to Judgment*, which alleged 222 cases of "bias targeted at Muslims in America" in the week after the bombing. A careful review of this study, however, finds it riddled with factual and conceptual errors: incidents are cited more than once, they differ from police reports, they are too vague to track down, or they derive from long after the Oklahoma City tragedy. Perhaps most instructive is this: whereas CAIR found 222 incidents just in the aftermath of the bombing, the FBI found only 29 anti-Muslim criminal incidents in all of 1995.

Finally, I take heart from the letter of Shaykh Abdul Hadi Palazzi and thank him for so bravely and constructively speaking his mind. I especially appreciate his noting how the self-anointed Muslim American leadership fails to condemn terrorism committed in the name of Islam, regrettably reinforcing the perceived connection between violence and Islam. I also concur with him on the paradox of Muslim Americans who live in the world's most democratic country but allow their Muslim leadership to be imposed upon them. (Whereas Shaykh Palazzi attributes this solely to Saudi hegemony, I would name other reasons as well, including the fact that moderates tend to integrate into American life, thus ceding the Islamic organizations to extremists.)

Let me conclude by quoting passages from a powerful article in the *Washington Times* of December 17, 2000, by Mustafa Elhussein, secretary of an Islamic cultural organization called the IbnKhaldun Society. Referring by name to the heads of such groups as CAIR and MPAC, Elhussein calls them "self-appointed leaders who spew hatred toward America and the West and yet claim to be the legitimate spokespersons for the American Muslim community." He finds that "there is a great deal of bitterness that such groups have tarnished the reputation of mainstream Muslims." He concludes that they "should not only be kept at arm's length from the political process, they should be actively opposed as extremists." And he calls on the media to "look at the record of statements of those Islamist leaders and label them the hate-mongers that they are."

To which I would add: if Muslims like Abdul Hadi Palazzi and Mustafa Elhussein so clearly understand the true nature of my critics, can the rest of us afford to lag behind?

The Schools

TO THE EDITOR:

Writing during a presidential campaign in which the candidates appeared to be running for the position of national superintendent of schools, Chester E. Finn, Jr. reminds us of a time when school programs were created to meet the local needs of children, parents, and communities—not the demands of a federal grant application ["Education and the Election," October 2000].

A big question in this election was who would end up running federal education policy. If Al Gore had been elected, it clearly would have been the National Education Association (NEA), whose activists endorsed him by a nine-to-one margin at their annual meeting in July. We could have expected four years of high federal spending on education and lots of happy talk from the White House about what a difference it was making.

Now that Bush has been elected, there are three possibilities. We could get Republican proposals of the pre-1994 variety—that is, more of the same, but less than the Democrats would do; an attempt to replicate the Texas educational model nationwide; or a return to federalism, in which education policy is left to the states.

The first possibility is most likely now that the Republican majority in Congress has narrowed still further. Mr. Finn mentions that Bush and the GOP have a laundry list of Washington-based initiatives of their own. If the economy remains strong, they will have every reason to spend more on education as opposed to areas where they might encounter serious Democratic resistance, such as the military.

As for the second possibility, if Bush thinks he can do for America what he did for Texas, he is in for a rude awakening. Citing the strong Bush record in that state, Mr. Finn notes support for his policies among many educators "and, sometimes, even . . . the assent of the teachers' unions." But like others before him, Mr. Finn fails to mention the unique and highly advantageous la-

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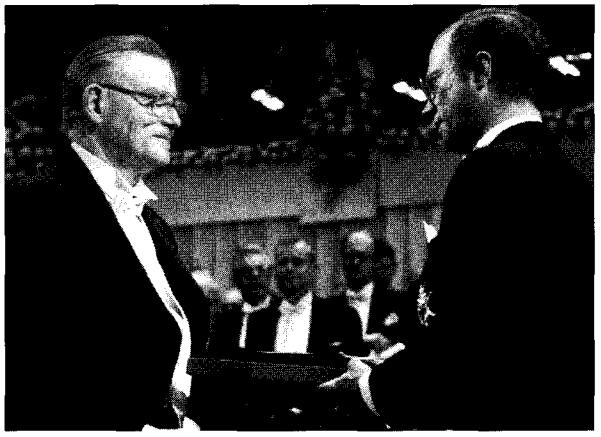

James M. Buchanan (left) receiving the Alfred Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences from Carl XVI Gustaf, king of Sweden, 1986

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bor conditions Bush enjoyed as governor.

Texas has 365,000 full-time instructional employees in its public-school system, less than one-quarter of whom belong to the NEA or the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). No one is required to join a labor union or pay fees to one. No school board is required to negotiate a collective-bargaining agreement with union representatives. The largest teachers' organization in the state, the Association of Texas Professional Educators, is not a union and is completely independent. No employee organization has exclusive rights, which means the NEA and AFT have to compete for members.

The successes of Texas are often compared to the failures of California because both states have similar demographics. But California has a 300,000-member NEA affiliate, padded by a statewide class-size reduction plan, plus the ability to demand fees from non-members. This year, the union extracted from a pliant Democratic governor an additional $1.84 billion in education spending, which was instantly negotiated into across-the-board raises of 10 to 12 percent for its members (concurrently adding millions of dollars to the unions' coffers). Bush has faced nothing like this.

The only hope is that Bush will recognize the important thing: not *what* he did in Texas but that he was free to do it. Getting the federal government out of the way would encourage governors, state legislators, and school-board members—many of them Democrats—to find and apply solutions that work for their states and localities. As Mr. Finn rightly concludes, the best role in education for a President would be "lending a hand and a well-amplified voice, and above all helping to minimize harm."

MIKE ANTONUCCI
Director
Education Intelligence Agency
Carmichael, California

TO THE EDITOR:

Though Chester E. Finn, Jr. has written a good essay, he seriously weakens his call for "standards-based and marketplace-style reform" when he derides the GOP's actual attempt at such reform in 1994. The "slash-and-burn strategy" used in the Republicans' "Contract with America," he says, was "easily turned against" them by President Clinton, who "succeeded in obliterating the federalism question altogether." Is Mr. Finn unhappy that Republicans took this stance or that they did not stick to it? Where the Democrats and the media are concerned, we are still in a culture war, and it will require eloquent warriors, not temporizing pragmatists, to prevail.

W. EDWARD CHYNOWETH
Sanger, California

CHESTER E. FINN, JR. writes:

Mike Antonucci is America's most tenacious and incisive watcher of teachers' unions, an invaluable source of intelligence and insight into the doings of those vast, shadowy, and mostly harmful organizations. To judge from his letter, however, he may have been stung by them once too often. He now seems to view the entire education solar system as revolving around them. Powerful as they are, that is an exaggeration.

Of course Governor Bush had an easier time of things because the teachers' unions in Texas have less influence than those in, say, California. But the unions do not have much influence in Alabama, either, and Alabama has hardly been a hotbed of education reform.

Education reform begins with ideas, values, and principles. George W. Bush's are basically sound. He will almost surely overestimate his, and the federal government's, ability to execute true reform from Washington, but the directions in which he will push will mostly be good ones, and that is more than we might have expected from a Gore

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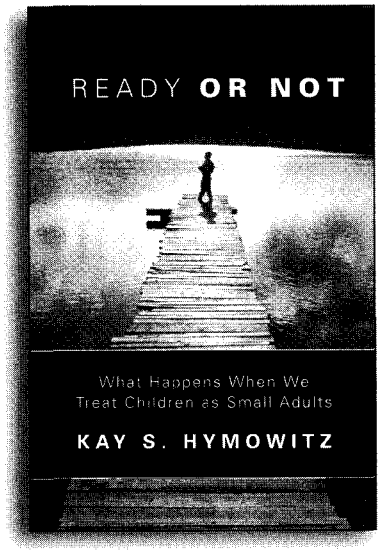

READY OR NOT

What Happens When We Treat Children as Small Adults

By Kay S. Hymowitz

"Children grow up so fast today!" This complaint, often tinged with a sense of bewilderment and helplessness, is heard with increasing frequency among parents today. Indeed, even the pre-teen "tweens" are sophisticated beyond their years, experiencing aspects of life heretofore considered "adult" and facing emotional and material overload that in the past would have daunted people twice their age.

In **Ready or Not,** Kay Hymowitz offers a startling look at the forces in the popular culture bombarding our children today. She shows how our ideas about childhood have been affected by "experts" urging us to treat children as "small adults." The most pernicious effect of this new development is that the independence and other trappings of maturity that children are given (rather than earning) at an early age paradoxically makes them less able to negotiate the passage to adulthood than their predecessors in an earlier, more protective time.

Ready or Not will make the reader think more than twice about the needs of children and the responsibilities of adults in a democratic society.

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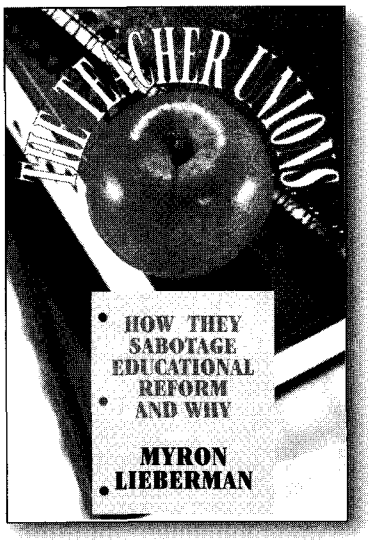
THE TEACHER UNIONS

How They Sabotage Educational Reform and Why

By Myron Lieberman



"Fixing" public education has become an American obsession. Parents are concerned about the issues of crowded classes, poor teacher pay, dilapidated buildings, and "dumbed down" subject matter.

According to educational theorist and scholar Myron Lieberman, the chief obstacle to solving these problems is the teachers' unions–the National Educational Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). With over three million members and national revenues of over $1.3 billion a year, the NEA and AFT are dedicated to maintaining the dysfunctional status quo that exists in our schools.

In this startling exposé, Lieberman shows how the teachers' unions raise and spend vast sums to maintain their power over education and to push a narrow political agenda. Even dues-paying teachers will be shocked to learn how their unions stifle dissent and sabotage meaningful reform.

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administration. Will the Bush team *under*estimate the damage that the national teachers' unions (and the rest of the sprawling public-education establishment) can do to his proposals? Probably. But that, too, is a more appealing prospect than an administration's calibrating its very proposals to suit the unions' agenda.

As for W. Edward Chynoweth's screed: as one who spends much of his time being excoriated for extremist tendencies, I find it almost refreshing to be associated with "temporizing pragmatists." Do I think the GOP should have taken a softer line on education after the '94 election? On the merits, no. But the slash-and-burn approach favored by congressional Republicans in 1995-96 was a political disaster, which helps explain why, in election after election, and despite the best efforts of Bush and Cheney, Republicans are simply not trusted to be reliable stewards of the nation's education fate—and why today's GOP margin is so perilously thin.

China's Future

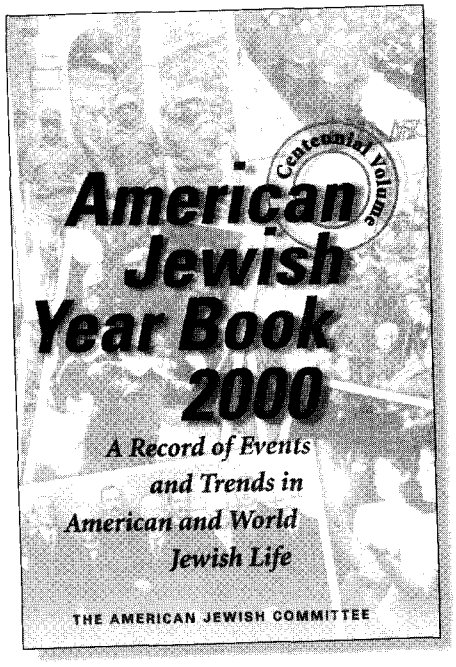
TO THE EDITOR:

I agree with Arthur Waldron that China's economic reforms over the past twenty years have produced an increasingly pluralistic society and a weakening party-state ["A Free and Democratic China?," November 2000]. The Chinese Communist party has been able to remain in power primarily because its policies have increased the standard of living of the average Chinese. But the impact of these reforms has been very uneven. Those who live in the countryside and in the inner provinces have fared less well than those in the cities and along the coast. Consequently, as Mr. Waldron points out, there has been a "steady rise in social unrest, crime, and corruption" that could undermine not only China's economic growth but also the party's legitimacy.

I disagree, however, with Mr. Waldron's conclusion that such occurrences would lead either to military rule, social breakdown, or genuine political reform. The military crackdown on unarmed student demonstrators in Tiananmen Square was an event that the military is reluctant to repeat. More important, it is unlikely that China's military could govern a population of 1.3 billion for long. This is especially true now, at the beginning of the 21st century, when China's population no longer believes in a unifying ideology like Confucianism.

A total breakdown also seems unlikely, primarily because the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people as well as the leadership believe that the only alternative to centralized rule is chaos, *luan*, the greatest fear of Chinese from time immemorial.

Most of China's leaders and elites would like to follow the path of the four "little dragons" of East Asia—Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Singapore—to a neo-authoritarian state presided over by a strong leader who would gradually lead China toward a market economy and democratic politics, which is Mr. Waldron's own preferred endpoint. With the exception of Singapore, these post-Confucian countries do prove that there is nothing in China's past to prevent the development of democracy. But it is unlikely that China will follow that path in the near future because of its huge population, a weak middle class, increasing inequality, and a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party leadership with little intention of stepping aside.

What appears more likely at least in the next ten years is a *limited* breakdown—increasing regional and local decentralization and political paralysis at the center. China's party leadership may adopt a muddling-through approach, something akin to that of Brezhnev in the Soviet Union. But unlike the Soviet Union, muddling-through in Beijing may not impede current economic growth. For long periods of China's premodern history, its regions and economy developed and thrived without a functioning central government. This does not mean that China will not democratize, but that it may take a much longer time.

In the meantime, the United States should not disengage from China. We can influence China's choices, if only marginally.

MERLE GOLDMAN
Boston University
Boston, Massachusetts

TO THE EDITOR:

Arthur Waldron clearly understands the dynamics of current social and cultural developments in China, particularly the mechanism underlying the potential and real conflicts within the present political system. Basing himself on this analysis, he suggests that stable political order will arrive in China only through constitutional democracy.

But the idea of a free China, so long sought by the populace, is frightening to Chinese president Jiang Zemin. According to one Politburo member in Beijing, Jiang is actually more worried about the citizens' demands for personal freedom than about national sovereignty and issues like reunification with Taiwan.

There is evidence of this in his brutal crackdown last July on peaceful Falun Gong practitioners who were seeking nothing more than the right to improve their health and observe traditional moral values. Such demands for basic human rights may seem simple and insignificant on the surface, yet they pose a direct challenge to Communist control. News of the recent triumph of democracy in the former Yugoslavia was also completely blocked in China, since Politburo members feared its impact. Anticipating the potential social unrest ahead, many corrupt bureaucrats are privately looking to ship their fortunes abroad.

On the international front, North Korea's recent friendly moves toward the U.S. add a new dimension to Beijing's concerns about losing the only remaining Communist dictator in the neighborhood, a comrade in arms for the past 50 years. And the success of grassroots democracy in Taiwan and Hong Kong tells the Chinese leaders what may inevitably lie ahead. Mr. Waldron's idea of a federalist constitution could be a practical way of coping with cries for regional autonomy in areas such as Tibet, Xinjiang, and Inner Mongolia.

Finally, Mr. Waldron correctly addresses the fundamental weakness in current U.S. policy toward China—namely, the assumption that China is economically on the right track and is automatically moving toward democracy. This idealistic assumption fails to take into consideration the serious social conflicts and unrest that are beginning to appear at all levels of society. It is simply naive to project that Communist China will just become a structural component of our own economic, political, and military security.

ERPING ZHANG
President
EZ Consulting
New York City

ARTHUR WALDRON writes:

Merle Goldman knows China well, but she does not really engage my argument. My point is that China is in such ferment that political change is inescapable whether or not we or the Chinese government like it. I choose a free and democra-

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tic system as my "preferred endpoint" for practical even more than for moral reasons: because I believe that only such a system can provide the legitimacy and functional flexibility to accommodate the complex society China is fast becoming.

Where exactly does Merle Goldman disagree? She recognizes that powerful forces are remaking China, and in ways that are "uneven" and painful for some, but draws no conclusion as to where they will lead. Instead, she turns to the understandable elite preference for "a strong leader who would gradually lead China toward a market economy and democratic politics." Can she really believe such a leader will appear? I do not, particularly in light of her apt comparison of the current leadership in Beijing to the USSR during the Brezhnev "era of stagnation."

But if not that, what then? Consider her own preferred picture: "*limited* breakdown—increasing regional and local decentralization and political paralysis at the center." This taxes credibility. How do you "limit" breakdown? Does Merle Goldman really imagine that after a century of brutal and relentless political conflict, China is about to settle down politically to live and let live? Is the party about to give up its totalistic claims? And as for "increasing regional and local decentralization," how is it to be made stable? Will the rivals for power suddenly stop using money, influence, the police, and the army to promote their causes, as they have always done and continue to do today?

All this is hard to imagine. More likely, political competition will continue and, in the absence of legitimate institutions, perhaps escalate. Legitimate political institutions are needed for order in a dynamic society. China currently lacks such institutions, and economic change alone does nothing to affect that.

My thanks to Erping Zhang for his thoughtful letter, which illustrates how many Chinese people, as opposed to foreign specialists, talk about their country. Never in my experience has a student or a cab driver or any other unofficial Chinese opened a conversation by remarking on the prospects for gradual amelioration based on a neo-authoritarian model, a gradual increase in the rule of law, local elections, or any of the other academic favorites. The first words are more likely to be along the lines of "You cannot imagine how corrupt this country is!," followed by endless vivid anecdotes.

What is the practical answer? I argue for the sort of change "practical" men dismiss as "idealistic," or as leading to chaos. But let us remember the point repeatedly emphasized by the great scholar Hu Shih in the midst of the political disorder of the 1920's. China, he wrote, is not inherently unstable. Its people would like nothing better than to pursue their lives within a fair and functional political system. Chaos originates not with the people but with the unbounded ambitions and fears of an illegitimate state and a lawless political class, and it is fed, ironically enough, by the very structures—one-party rule, state-run media, political murder and imprisonment—that those rulers regularly tout, not least to credulous foreigners, as necessary for maintaining order. As we continue to engage China, let us keep our eyes wide open.

Canonizing

TO THE EDITOR:

In "Writing Jewish" [October 2000] Hillel Halkin explains that the book of Job is "an integral part of Jewish literary tradition," but, he argues, this is the case "in spite of [its] contents." In my opinion, the reason for canonization of this masterpiece, in addition to its poetic beauty, is that it delivers a message—one must not look for a correlation between one's moral behavior and one's fate—which is important to the Jewish tradition. It is reasonable to assume that throughout Jewish history, spiritual leaders cited Job when faced with the unanswerable question of why the just are not always rewarded and the wicked not always punished.

Regarding the provenance of the book, I believe, contrary to Mr. Halkin, that the text was originally composed in Hebrew, given its intensity, economy of words, unique grammatical forms, and use of rare words, all of which would be unusual in a translation. One need only compare the King James translation to the Hebrew text to realize that no translation can do more than limited justice to such poetic gems.

MOSHE SOREK
Great Neck, New York

HILLEL HALKIN writes:

Actually, Jewish spiritual leaders in the past have seldom cited the book of Job as an illustration of "why the just are not always rewarded and the wicked not always punished," perhaps because this does not seem to be the message of the book, since Job *is* rewarded at its end. Moreover, normative biblical and rabbinic theology both hold that the just are always rewarded and the wicked always punished—if not in this life or generation, then in the next.

Had Mr. Sorek read my article more carefully, he would have seen that I do not endorse the view that Job was originally written in a language other than Hebrew. I thoroughly agree with him that a non-Hebrew provenance is inconsistent with the rich and often idiosyncratic fluency of the book's language.

Digital Age

TO THE EDITOR:

In his review of George Gilder's latest book, *Telecosm*, Francis Fukuyama [October 2000] lists several writers who have probed the visionary potential of the digital age. The writer he identifies as Helen Cairncross is actually Frances Cairncross, senior editor at the *Economist* and author of, most recently, *The Death of Distance: How the Communications Revolution Will Change Our Lives.*

SCOTT LAHTI
Lansing, Michigan

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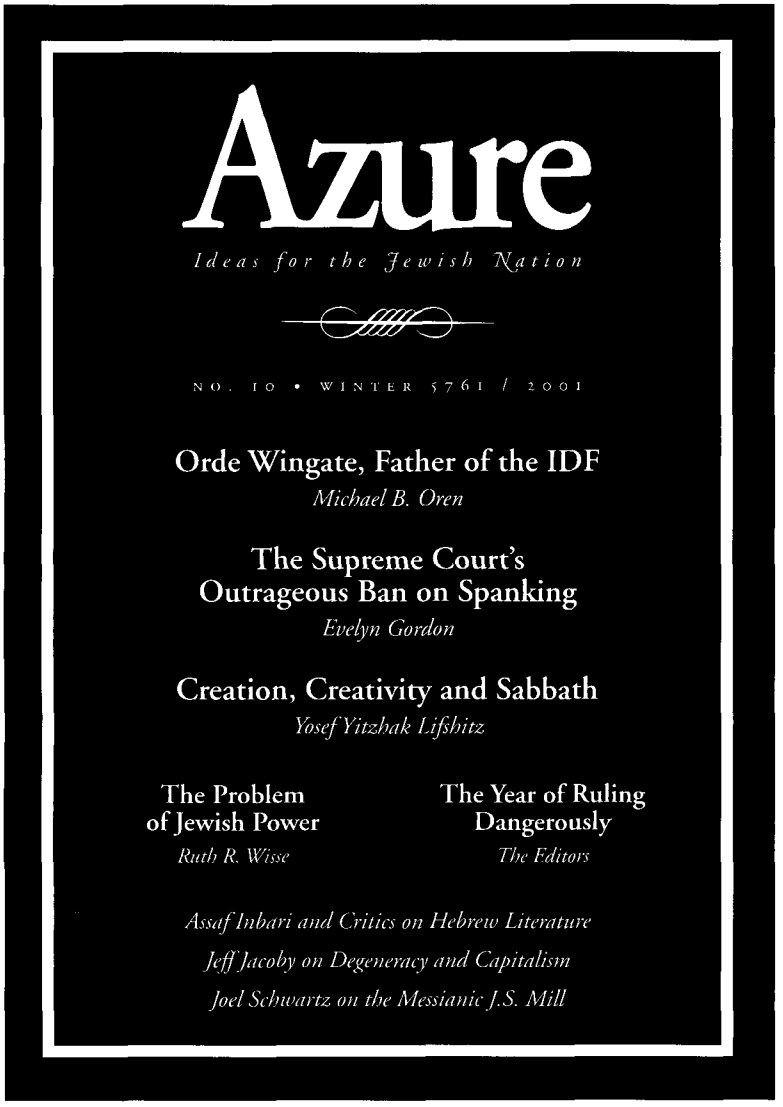
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CONTROVERSY

Facing China

Aaron L. Friedberg & Critics

(RET.) LIEUTENANT GENERAL WILLIAM E. ODOM :

In "The Struggle for Mastery in Asia" [November 2000], Aaron L. Friedberg offers a very textured and thoughtful analysis of the challenges facing the United States in Asia. In his view, the People's Republic of China (PRC) will emerge as the major threat to American interests there and will become, implicitly, the focal point of U.S. strategy not only in the region but in the world. One might dismiss such a view as nostalgia for the cold war, a time when the enemy was clear, but I do not. Indeed, Mr. Friedberg's treatment is an excellent starting point for thinking through U.S. strategy.

That said, his article puzzles me on several points. First, he fails to emphasize the huge advantages in power that the United States has in its competition with China. Second, he does not make Japan central to his analysis. In fact, "the struggle for mastery in Asia" is more likely to be a conflict between Japan and China. The question for the United States is which side to choose. It sided with China until 1949, with Japan thereafter, getting dramatically preferable results.

Mr. Friedberg believes that China can intimidate Japan, forcing it to be cooperative or at least neutral toward China. But given its enormous economic and technological advantages, Japan is more likely to rearm against China than to kowtow to it. Today, the gross domestic products (GDP) of Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan—all within the United States's formal and informal alliance structure in Asia—amount to many times that of China. The PRC cannot catch up in three or four decades even if it manages, in Mr. Friedberg's phrase, to "hang together." When the U.S. GDP is added to the total, then the deck is surely stacked against China. Moreover, the outcome of the game will be decided not in South and Southeast Asia, regions to which Mr. Friedberg devotes too much attention, but in Northeast Asia, where power is concentrated.

Certainly Taiwan is a serious issue, and Mr. Friedberg rightly sees it as a possible catalyst for a U.S.-China conflict. If the U.S. adopts a foreign policy that gives Japan, not China, first priority, then the U.S. alliance system in the region will be positioned to confront China with overwhelming military advantages in a fight over Taiwan. Chinese military modernization cannot offset this in the near, or even distant, future.

Mr. Friedberg worries that U.S. leadership simply will not be up to implementing an effective strategy because business interests will force it to make concessions to China. Here he sounds a proper warning, and I hope his piece is widely read in American corporate boardrooms, where an excessively benign view of China dominates.

Hudson Institute
Washington D.C.

HENRY S. ROWEN:

Aaron L. Friedberg sees three kinds of challenges coming from China: economic, military, and political. The first he overstates. Of course China dangles access to its growing market in front of other governments, but he fails to note that it is not unique in linking politics to trade. For China to dump its large dollar reserves, as he suggests

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it might do, would mean threatening a global system on which it relies. Moreover, China is likely to become a capital importer at a time when access to American technology is highly rated.

I believe that Mr. Friedberg is right about the military challenge that China poses, but some of his rhetoric misleads, as when he asserts that the U.S. is "preponderant" in Asia. It is true that we can apply air and naval power more widely than can others, but China is not an adversary like Iraq in 1990 or Serbia in 1999. And it is useful to recall that not so long ago we lost a war in Vietnam; twenty years before that we settled for a stalemate in Korea; and five years before that we gave up trying to prevent a Communist takeover in China. We can affect some things, notably on the oceanic fringe of Asia, but this does not make us "preponderant."

An important aspect of the military challenge is timing. China's technological capacity is advancing, but Beijing has other priorities and is not investing heavily in its military. It has far to go to realize most of the capabilities Mr. Friedberg postulates—except in the realm of missiles. There, China has long been able to strike the U.S. with nuclear weapons and can easily offset our modest, proposed National Missile Defense system.

Mr. Friedberg also correctly observes that Chinese missile tests in the Taiwan Strait in 1995-96 heightened the perceived threat posed by missiles with nonnuclear warheads. Because of the short distances involved, China has many technical options, and it is unclear that Taiwan's acquisition of Theater Missile Defense would be very effective against them. There may be an opening for arms control to deal with this problem. An agreement by Taiwan not to deploy missile defenses if the mainland restricts the number of missiles deployed against it might be backed up by an ability (with U.S. help) to put such defenses quickly in place.

As for the political challenge, Mr. Friedberg plausibly describes a Chinese divide-and-conquer strategy that relies on placing obstacles in the way of concerted action by its victims. Nonetheless, some of China's neighbors have records of considerable robustness. Although, as Mr. Friedberg writes, a grand coalition against China is hard to imagine, to suggest that no defensive coalition among Asian nations could occur is an extreme assertion.

The big gap in Mr. Friedberg's story is Chinese domestic politics. Despite various kinds of repression, personal liberties have greatly increased for many people, and political ones will increase as well. Every country with income levels of the kind that China is likely to attain within two decades, including several countries in the Chinese cultural sphere, is rated at least "partly free" by Freedom House in its annual report. Although the path on which a developed China becomes a democracy might be troubled, when (not if) it happens, the observation that democracies tend not to fight each other will become relevant. Mr. Friedberg says that it is "conceivable" that a richer China may not become more benign, but the odds suggest that it will be.

Here timing is again crucial. Much the best solution to the division across the Taiwan Strait is for China to become politically pluralistic enough for a democratic Taiwan to rejoin it willingly. That, in fact, is the official Taiwan position. A more democratic China is coming, probably within a few decades, and given that prospect a conflict there would be an enormous tragedy.

Stanford University
Palo Alto, California

MICHAEL SWAINE:

I agree with Aaron L. Friedberg that a truly powerful and aggressive China could present unprecedented difficulties for the United States, given its size, dynamism, and extensive involvement in the international polity and economy. Indeed, my colleague Ashley Tellis and I have recently written a book, *Interpreting China's Grand Strategy: Past, Present, and Future*, that makes precisely this point. But I do not agree with him that the existing competitive aspects of the Sino-American relationship now constitute a nascent military rivalry for continental dominance.

We might reach this point in the not-too-distant future if analysts continue to mix accounts (some accurate, some not) of Beijing's current misbehavior and growing capabilities with hair-raising scenarios of future economic, military, and diplomatic subterfuge, as if the latter ineluctably follow from the former. This type of argumentation—which Mr. Friedberg employs repeatedly—could lead most ordinary observers to conclude, incorrectly, that an intense geostrategic rivalry is virtually inevitable, and to respond accordingly.

Though China would most likely desire to exercise preponderant power in Asia if the opportunity were to arise, it is by no means clear that it is pursuing this objective today. China's current security strategy is above all cautious, pragmatic, and primarily focused on the near term. Although China might eventually choose (or the U.S. might push it into) a more assertive course, it also might not so choose, especially if it democratizes.

To his credit, Mr. Friedberg states that China might "mellow with the passage of time," or be hampered by internal weakness, or that an assertive China might overplay its hand and provoke a response that could "block its ambitions." But such factors are merely mentioned in passing, as if they do not merit serious consideration. In truth, it is quite possible, perhaps even likely, that China will not acquire the capabilities or develop the focused intent to struggle with

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America for mastery in Asia. This possibility—and the consequent need for a U.S. policy that is designed both to encourage a cooperative China and to cope with a more assertive one—is one that Mr. Friedberg should have more fully acknowledged and assessed.

RAND
Santa Monica, California

VICTOR D. CHA:

Although Aaron L. Friedberg makes strong arguments forecasting an open Sino-American competition in Asia, he says that such an outcome is only plausible, not inevitable. Yet one cannot help thinking that, in his eyes, the competition is indeed inevitable.

What sort of Chinese behavior, one wonders, might *avert* the path of competitive relations with Washington? A list would most likely include Beijing's pursuit of full integration into the world economy; avid support of multilateral security dialogues; cultivation of more open relations with the rest of the Western world; help in curtailing Islamic fundamentalism; pressure on North Korea for peace on the Korean peninsula; the quest for better relations with India; and disavowal of any desire for regional or global hegemony. But would not these very measures be taken by Mr. Friedberg as "signposts" of a wider Chinese political strategy for winning friends and easing the U.S. out of the region?

Georgetown University
Washington, D.C.

ZALMAY KHALILZAD :

Aaron L. Friedberg believes that the current mix of cooperation and competition in the U.S. relationship with China is likely to evolve into a geopolitical competition for preeminence. His judgment is reasonable and cannot be dismissed by defense planners and strategists. But Mr. Friedberg's framework should not be the only one informing U.S. policy.

For one thing, he implies that the current Chinese regime and/or its likely successor will pursue regional hegemony. This is by no means inevitable. Given some plausible domestic changes in China, relations with the U.S. could become less competitive or more cooperative than they are today.

For another thing, Mr. Friedberg assumes that China will remain a stable nation. But if China fragments as a result of a sharp decline in its economy or a failed military effort against Taiwan, it would be in less of a position to challenge U.S. interests. A China with internal factions competing for legitimacy might well become less engaged internationally.

Although Mr. Friedberg does not recommend a particular approach for dealing with China, his framework implies that we should already be pursuing a containment strategy, seeking to slow China's economic and military rise. But that is not the only available course. The challenge before us is to use the current Chinese leadership's desire for economic development to induce it to promote a democratic transformation, while simultaneously hedging against the possibility that China will push for regional hegemony.

In cooperation with our allies, the Bush administration should pursue a mixed strategy, continuing to engage China economically but also constraining the growth of Chinese military power by reaching agreements with Israel, Russia, and others that will limit the transfer to China of military equipment and related technologies.

If China chooses to cooperate with the current international system and becomes democratic, this mixed policy could evolve into mutual accommodation and partnership. If China becomes a hostile power bent on regional domination, the U.S. posture could turn into containment. The former is very much to be preferred; whether the latter can be avoided is primarily up to China.

RAND
Arlington, Virginia

DOV ZAKHEIM:

The title of Aaron L. Friedberg's essay, "The Struggle for Mastery in Asia," conveys a far more alarmist tone than does his conclusion. Mr. Friedberg is fundamentally correct to assert that "in several important respects a U.S.-PRC strategic competition is already under way," but whether, as he also asserts, "there is a good chance that it is only going to become more intense and open" is more problematical.

The nature of that competition, as Mr. Friedberg acknowledges, will very much depend on American behavior, a subject that he has deliberately not addressed. It will also depend on how far and how fast the Chinese economy can continue to grow. (If America's economy slows down, and Japan's does not revive, Chinese prospects will inevitably suffer as well.) And a great deal will also hinge on how Japan reacts to China's policies and, to a lesser extent, on the strength of a now relatively enfeebled Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Unless one assumes that Japan will remain mired in its current doldrums for decades, an increasingly assertive China could easily help to reinvigorate the Japanese-American alliance and solidify the American alliance with Korea. It could also frighten the ASEAN countries, notably Vietnam, into seeking more open American protection, as well as encouraging India to develop further its still nascent nuclear capabilities. Finally, it may cause Moscow to consider improving its ties to Washington.

In other words, Chinese aggressiveness could well unite its competitors and, as with 19th-century Germany, bring about the very strategic nightmare it most seeks to avoid: encirclement by a concordat of powerful, suspicious neighbors,

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all of them at least friendly with, if not allied to, the United States.

Systems Planning Corporation
Arlington, Virginia

RAJAN MENON:

With few exceptions, American Sinologists are proponents of engagement. Draw China into a web of political and economic transactions, they argue, and with time Beijing will acquire a stake in managing, rather than challenging, the prevailing order in Asia and elsewhere. Indeed, in a classic case of what the social psychologist Irving Janis termed "groupthink," engagement has become the orthodoxy. The Chinese government, heir to a long and rich tradition of courting "barbarians," has, with great finesse and subtlety, encouraged the preaching of this gospel in the West—above all in the United States.

Though our Sinologists will therefore not like what Aaron L. Friedberg has to say, his essay deserves to be read widely precisely because it is an act of heresy. That said, however, there are aspects of his analysis with which I disagree. He glosses over—indeed, dismisses—the possibility of instability in China and, ironically, is in sync with most China specialists in this respect. But it is a plausible scenario nevertheless. He also makes the future too rosy for China's leaders in supposing that they will deploy an intricate, cunning "grand strategy" and that the other states of Asia will react in a manner that is malleable, obliging, and even pawn-like. Yet the balance-of-power process is never quite so kind to great powers on the move, and it is unlikely that China will be able to orchestrate events with precision.

Lehigh University
Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

RICHARD J. ELLINGS:

Aaron L. Friedberg believes that the U.S. position in Asia is vulnerable and concludes that we need to begin to acknowledge the threat of China. But by anticipating a threat before it fully emerges the U.S. might exacerbate that threat through preparations that appear alarming.

Much can happen in the years ahead. China's fragile financial structure or corrupt political system could collapse, or its halting progress toward open markets could produce significant democratic reform. The competence of China's leadership to govern the vast country is highly suspect. Instead of a military rivalry between the United States and China, one can also imagine, at one extreme, chaos in China, or, at another, war between China and its neighbors, or, at still another, regional security buttressed through

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cooperative arrangements among more or less democratic states in the Asian Pacific.

While Mr. Friedberg seems to believe that economic coercion might be effective in trying to isolate China, this approach seems circumscribed in today's globally competitive environment. It would be better to devise a strategy that protects American interests while not rushing us into rivalry, that engages Chinese leaders and society, and encourages them to develop the rule of law and free markets while requiring China's acceptance of the rules associated with its participation in the world economy.

All the same, Aaron Friedberg is to be commended for understanding the possibilities of strategic competition and conflict with China. No nation, and certainly not the United States as global leader, can afford to neglect the rise of a power that might pose the principal threat to its vital interests. In his extraordinarily valuable essay, Mr. Friedberg raises in very sophisticated fashion nothing less than *the* major challenge before U.S. strategists in the new century.

National Bureau of Asian Research
Seattle, Washington

ALAN DUPONT:

Aaron L. Friedberg argues persuasively that the tensions between the U.S. and China are almost certain to increase in the decades ahead. But whether events will unfold in quite the manner he suggests is a moot point.

In the economic sphere, there is little doubt that China will seek to become less reliant on the U.S. and to leverage its expanding economic power to political and strategic advantage. But this is neither surprising nor unduly worrisome. The U.S. has long used its economic clout to advance its national interests, mostly in benign ways. Why should China be any different? Its revolutionary period has long since faded into history, and its economic relationship with the U.S. is more likely to be characterized by mutual interdependence than by destabilizing competition.

It is true that over the next twenty or thirty years China will develop a significant power-projection capability, especially at sea, enabling it for the first time to challenge U.S. military preponderance on the Asian littoral and to complicate life for the U.S. Navy in the Taiwan Strait. But the U.S. is vastly superior to China militarily and will not stand idly by as the Middle Kingdom proceeds to acquire the accoutrements of a major military power. In fact, many informed strategic analysts believe that the military gap between the two potential rivals could widen rather than narrow in favor of the United States, and the U.S. may continue to hold sway in the ocean reaches of the western Pacific for longer than Mr. Friedberg suggests.

In an age of globalization, the relative geographical remoteness of the U.S. from Asia matters far less than it once did, and certainly does not confer on China a decisive political and diplomatic advantage. On the contrary, as Mr. Friedberg acknowledges, a rising China will encourage Asian states to support a countervailing U.S. influence. That is why it is incumbent on the new administration to demonstrate a renewed strategic, diplomatic, and economic commitment to the region. For if regional states perceive that U.S. influence is in decline, they will become increasingly susceptible to China's blandishments, and the outcomes that Mr. Friedberg fears are more likely to come to pass.

Strategic and Defense Studies Center
Australian National University
Canberra, Australia

MICHAEL O'HANLON:

Some of Aaron L. Friedberg's readers may be prone to interpret his sobering essay as a call to arms against a new looming foe. Motivated by that worry, I would like to offer several reasons why Americans need not acutely fear the Chinese or single-mindedly pursue deterrence ahead of continued engagement with China.

First, China's ability to split the United States from its allies in East Asia, a specter Mr. Friedberg raises several times, is only remotely plausible. My distinct impression in dealing with policymakers and academics in Korea and Japan, for instance, is that China's veiled threats tend to strengthen America's Asian alliances rather than weaken them.

Second, although it is historically true that great powers tend to compete, there is reason to hope that future relationships among the world's major countries will be more constructive and constrained than they have been in the past. The end of the era of colonialism has reduced the likelihood of future great-power competition over control of territory. The tremendous destructiveness of the world wars and the existence of nuclear weapons have sobered all attentive policymakers to the risks of major armed conflict. These historical lessons do not, alas, preclude the possibility of conflict over Taiwan, but they do tend to reduce the odds that China and the United States will embark on a more general geostrategic competition throughout Asia.

Third, China's military, while improving, is not nearly as good as it would have to be to challenge the United States in East Asia. Taiwan could handily defeat an attempted PRC invasion on its own for the foreseeable future. While it might need American help to break a Chinese naval blockade of the island, U.S. forces could handle such a mission confidently and comfortably at their current size. Although PRC military capabilities will improve over time, there is a strong argument to be made that China's political system is liberalizing much faster than its armed forces are improving, and that such liberalization

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will dramatically reduce the odds of conflict in the years ahead.

These observations, if true, do not obviate the importance of Mr. Friedberg's warning. But they should serve to remind Americans to think at least as hard about how to engage China as about how to deter, constrain, or defeat it.

Brookings Institution
Washington, D.C.

PAUL S. GIARRA:

Aaron L. Friedberg's signal service has been to clarify the outlines of a Sino-American competition that is difficult to win and harder to avoid. Hardliners appear to have won out in Beijing. Since 1949, the balance of power across the Taiwan Strait has been defined by the ability of the United States to dominate, and therefore deter, any Chinese attack against Taiwan, thus keeping the two antagonists apart, but new People's Liberation Army capabilities and doctrines are clearly designed to overcome this American-imposed stand-off. According to press reports, Chinese military planners now routinely envision fighting their American counterparts, and the Pentagon has begun to return the favor.

This preliminary indication of the state of strategic bilateral relations may not be definitive, and at this stage is by no means predictive, but in military terms the Sino-American competition will certainly present significant challenges to the United States, broadly parallel to those of the cold war. This does not mean simply picking up where we left off with the Soviet Union. Strategic circumstances have changed, China is very different from the Soviet Union—and the United States has greatly diminished prospects of leading a grand coalition against it. Bases and industrial infrastructure have been reduced along with force structure, in many cases more so, and alliances have relaxed their vigilant tension.

Japan will play a major role in how relations develop between China and the United States, by no means necessarily for the better. The slow but steady military normalization of Japan; differing American and Japanese interests and perspectives; Japan's perennial insecurity; the virtually complete American reliance upon tenuous bases in Japan; and the looming potential for conflict over Taiwan present challenges for which the U.S.-Japan alliance is ill-prepared. Proponents of playing

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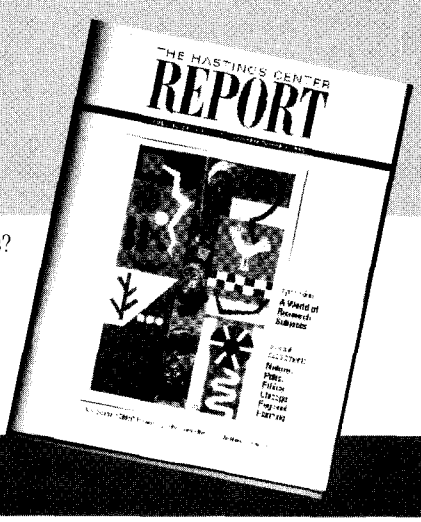

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the Japan card in our competition with China seriously misread Tokyo's ability or propensity to support American interests, strategies, and actions vis-à-vis China and elsewhere. To the contrary, without careful recalibration of the alliance, Japan could become not only an impediment but a liability.

Science Applications International Corporation
McLean, Virginia

JAMES R. LILLEY:

At last, a thoughtful scholar has described the realities of China with cold-blooded objectivity. Aaron L. Friedberg provides a persuasive answer to apologists who repeat ad nauseam that considering China a threat could become a self-fulfilling prophecy, as well as to those who cannot mention Taiwan without attaching a pejorative suffix, as in the Taiwan "question," or "problem," or "dilemma," or even "albatross." These slick word games have contaminated American thinking about China. I hope Mr. Friedberg has put them to rest, although I frankly doubt it.

The evidence is overwhelming that China perceives the world as Mr. Friedberg describes it. China seeks to neutralize America's ability to project power by exploiting the vulnerability of our aircraft-carriers to missile attack, by undermining U.S. reliance on satellites for intelligence and communications, and by negating the ability of stealth bombers to avoid radar. China has also outspokenly acted to dismember the U.S. alliance structure by effectively playing on other nations' concerns about U.S. arrogance and "hegemonism." Using the leverage of a growing and powerful economy, China alternately practices the art of seducing and undercutting its principal rival, Japan.

What Mr. Friedberg's article misses is the powerful dynamic of Taiwanese trade and investment in China as a potential restraint on the mainland's more militant objectives. Sustaining economic growth, which is essential, especially in the tumultuous years ahead as China joins the World Trade Organization, depends more and more on Taiwan.

The volatility of Chinese domestic conditions, which Mr. Friedberg understands clearly, could well determine China's future approach to the world. He is correct that the business of China today is increasingly becoming business. I would only add that war can be bad for business.

American Enterprise Institute
Washington, D.C.

S. ENDERS WIMBUSH:

Aaron L. Friedberg is one of America's leading strategic thinkers, and his unsentimental assessment of the emerging China is a welcome rebuttal to some of the wishful thinking that has taken root in official U.S. foreign-policy circles. His evaluation of the coming—indeed, existing—competition with China is reminiscent of George F. Kennan's assessments more than a half-century ago of the emerging challenge from the Soviet Union. Kennan's intuitive sense of Soviet strategic culture and the Soviet leadership's longterm objectives ultimately came to be reflected in a winning U.S. strategy. Mr. Friedberg's sense of the emerging China deserves no less attention.

Mr. Friedberg bases his analysis of "the struggle for mastery in Asia" on three key assumptions that seem safe, although it would not be difficult to imagine that at least two of them could be false. Like Mr. Friedberg, I cannot conceive of a China that will forgo its ambitions of becoming a global power. I can, however, imagine a much more brittle China that could fracture along its prominent ethnic, economic, regional, environmental, and political fault-lines. Nevertheless, a brittle China—weak, chaotic and dangerously unpredictable, but still able to employ substantial military capabilities—could prove to be as formidable a competitor as a strong China.

The assumption that the U.S. will stay the course in Asia might also be wrong. At least, I doubt that we can simply assert this to be true with much confidence. The past decade or so of irresolute American military engagement in many parts of the world—Iraq, Somalia, the Balkans—raises strong doubts about the willingness of U.S. policymakers to enter any international competition that demands more than bombing from a safe altitude or firing cruise missiles at illusive terrorists. These doubts are likely to become more pronounced as the weapons of our opponents become more sophisticated and their understanding of our reluctance to take casualties leads them to create new and more deadly strategies.

Even if we assume that America will continue to have the will to project power in Asia over the next few decades, the question remains of where it will project that power from. The obvious answer is from Japan and Korea, but this "handful of local friends and allies," as Mr. Friedberg calls them, is already small, and persistent internal and external forces could buffet them in ways that will work to make it smaller still. We should be wary of assuming that Japan and Korea will always be there for us and that their strategic objectives will remain in concert with our own. Japan is at a turning point already as it tries to find some manageable synthesis of its own strategic ambitions and limitations. And if Korea unifies, it is difficult to imagine that U.S. troops will remain there in the face of almost certain opposition from large parts of the enlarged Korean population and from China.

The new administration needs to get serious about naming its opponents in Asia. Mr. Friedberg deserves our thanks for making that seem so obvious.

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The Arabs of Israel

Are they a "persecuted minority?"

The world is once again confronted with violence in Israel and its administered territories. On the pretext of one of Israel's ministers visiting the Temple Mount, the Palestinians erupted in bloody rioting, which has not yet ended and in which hundreds so far have died. Most distressing, Israeli Arabs, citizens of the country, have joined in the rioting and have suffered and caused many casualties.

What are the facts?

Israel is a Democratic Country. Israel is an open, pluralistic, and egalitarian society. Different religions, cultures, and social traditions co-exist. Protection of such diversity is embedded in Israel's traditions and confirmed by the government. About 20% of the population (over one million people) are non-Jews, most of them Arabs, and some Druze. Like all other Israeli citizens, they have full rights to vote and to hold elective office. Both Arabs and Druze hold seats in the Knesset, the Israeli parliament. Every Knesset, since the founding of the State in 1948, has had Arab and Druze members. All transactions in the Knesset are simultaneously translated into Arabic, and Arab members may address the Knesset in Arabic.

It is official policy of the Israeli government to foster the language, culture, and traditions of the Arab minority, in the educational system and in daily life. Arabic is an official language in Israel, together with Hebrew. Israel's Arabic press is the most vibrant and independent of any country in the region. There are more than 20 Arabic periodicals. They publish what they please, subject only to the same military censorship as Jewish publications. There are daily TV and radio programs in Arabic. Arabic is taught in Jewish secondary schools. Israeli universities are renowned centers of learning in the history and literature of the Arab Middle East.

Education and literacy of the Arab population in Israel is as high as and probably higher than in any Arab country. The literacy rate among Israeli Arabs is 95%, virtually the same as for Israeli Jews. There are close to 1,000 Arab educational institutions in Israel, with about 300,000 students—just about 25 times as many as in 1948, when the State of Israel was created, Ninety percent of Arab children attend school, probably the highest ratio of any Arab population anywhere. Israeli universities and technical institutions are freely available to the Arabs. About 5,000 Arab students attend such schools.

Israeli Arabs Enjoy Full Equality in Law and in Fact. All religious communities in Israel enjoy the full protection of the State. Israeli Arabs—Moslems, as well as many Christian denominations—are free to exercise their faiths, to observe their own weekly day of rest and holidays, and to administer their own internal affairs. Each community has its own religious councils and courts, and has full jurisdiction over religious affairs, including matters of personal status, such as marriage and divorce. The holy sites of all religions are administered by their own authorities and protected by the government.

> "Contrary to propaganda...the Arabs in Israel enjoy every civil right and have the same status under law as Jewish Israelis"

In contrast to the non-Israeli Arab world, Arab women in Israel enjoy the same status as men. Israeli law grants women equal rights, including the right to vote and to be elected to public office, prohibits polygamy, child marriage, and the barbarity of female sexual mutilation. It has thus vastly changed the status of women, to far above that of any country in the region. Israeli health standards are by far the highest in the Middle East. Israeli health institutions are freely open to all Arabs, on the same basis as they are to Jews.

There is, however, one difference between the "rights" of Arabs and Jews in Israel. Israeli and Druze men are required to do three years of military service and then serve one month every year until they are 50. Arabs are exempted from military duty and are not required to perform any compensating civilian service. Since the surrounding Arab states are the avowed enemies of Israel and dedicated to its destruction (there is "peace" with Egypt and Jordan), this exemption is granted by the Israeli government to its Arab citizens, so as to spare them conflicts of loyalty and conscience.

Contrary to propaganda and to what many believe, the Arabs in Israel are full-fledged citizens, enjoy every civil right, have the same status in law as Jewish Israelis, and can freely move all over the country without fear of being harassed, attacked, or killed. In summary, they enjoy the highest standards of living and liberty of any Arabs in the Middle East. In a recent poll, 70% of Israel's Arabs declared that they identified with and felt loyalty to the Palestinians, and not to the state of Israel. Significantly, however, the same percentage (70%) declared that they would much prefer to live in Israel than in any other country in the area. It is instructive and sobering to compare the condition of the approximately one million Arabs in Israel with that of the pitiful remnants of Jewry in Arab countries. Jews have been living in Arab countries for almost 2,000 years. Under Arab dominance, they were always third-class citizens and subject to harassment and persecution. There were about 900,000 Jews in Arab countries in 1946—now there are fewer than 25,000. But there are now over one million Arabs in Israel, many more than after the exodus in 1948 – a manifold increase. That alone would seem to prove that things can't be all that bad for Arabs in Israel.

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Aaron L. Friedberg

I AM grateful for the many thoughtful responses to my essay. Rather than attempting to answer each letter in detail, I would like to address a number of recurrent themes.

China will change.

Several of my correspondents (including Messrs. Rowen, Swaine, Khalilzad, Menon, Ellings, O'Hanlon, and Wimbush) note that China could undergo fundamental domestic political change in the years ahead, perhaps becoming fragmented, chaotic, and weak or, alternatively, transforming itself into a functioning, stable democracy. In the first instance, China's leaders might be deprived of the ability to challenge the United States; in the second, they would presumably lack the inclination to do so.

I do not dismiss the possibility of serious unrest in China—although, for purposes of discussion, I did explicitly assume that the country would remain essentially intact over the next several decades. But what internal weakness might imply for external behavior is far from clear. As Enders Wimbush suggests, an unstable and unpredictable China could still pose serious problems for the United States. And there can be little doubt that a "failed" Chinese state would present its neighbors with enormous challenges: it could swamp them with refugees, cheap weapons, and pollutants, even if it no longer threatened to dominate them.

And what of a mellower, more democratic China?* This is an outcome devoutly to be wished, of course, but one that does not seem likely to come quickly or without considerable upheaval. Regimes in transition from strict authoritarianism to greater political openness have historically been prone to bouts of aggressive nationalism. As China's elites compete more openly for power among themselves, and as they feel increasingly compelled to justify their continuing collective rule to the Chinese people, they may resort to antiforeign sentiment and even to external adventures as a means of mobilizing domestic support. Finally, it should be noted that, in its early stages, even a more fully democratic China could prove prickly, assertive, and difficult to deal with. Anyone who doubts this should consider the early history of the United States.

The balance of power will balance.

William E. Odom, Henry S. Rowen, Dov Zakheim, Rajan Menon, and Michael O'Hanlon all suggest that other Asian countries will join with the United States in order to offset China's rising power.

This is a strong possibility, and indeed there is evidence that it is already occurring. Continued movement in this direction cannot, however, be taken entirely for granted. The balance of power is not an automatic equilibrating mechanism. I agree with Alan Dupont that the willingness of other countries to cast in their lot with us will depend on their own estimation of our power, steadiness, and seriousness of purpose. How we act, and how well we counter Chinese efforts to raise doubts about our role, will be critical.

As both Paul S. Giarra and Mr. Wimbush suggest, moreover, the solidity and permanence of our most important regional alliances cannot simply be assumed. Japan is in the midst of wrenching economic, social, and political changes that could well have a dramatic impact on its foreign and defense policies. North and South Korea are likely again to become one country, and perhaps sooner rather than later. A reunified Korea could choose to stay aligned with the United States, but it might also shift toward a more neutral stance or even "tilt" toward China. The new Bush administration faces few tasks more important than preserving close ties to our two key democratic allies in Northeast Asia.

The Chinese military will continue to lag behind.

It is true that, in almost every respect, China's armed forces are today greatly inferior to those of the United States. But it would be dangerously complacent to assume that this will continue to be the case indefinitely. Although Beijing may have "other priorities," as Mr. Rowen asserts, it does not follow that it "is not investing heavily in its military." The exact scale of the expenditure may be a subject of debate, but there is little question that the PRC is devoting considerable resources to the various missions that I described in my article: building up theater ballistic missiles with which to intimidate its neighbors, strengthening its ability to strike directly at the United States, and acquiring the elements of an "anti-access" capability that could complicate and raise the costs of any American attempt to project power into the Western Pacific.

China may be decades away from building a force that could challenge the United States at any point on the globe, if it even wishes to do so. But it may not be nearly so far from building one that would enable it to pose a serious threat to U.S. interests and forces in East Asia. Taiwan is the most obvious sore spot and danger point here.

Whatever the objective balance of military power, there is also the ever-present danger of miscalculation. Instead of resting on our laurels, we should be closely tracking the Chinese military buildup and, equally important, gaining a better understanding of how China's leaders assess the prospects for a successful use of force. If we fail to attend adequately to these tasks we risk some very unpleasant surprises.

China's economic diplomacy is neither new nor worrisome.

Messrs. Rowen and Dupont both note that China is hardly unique in

* For an extended discussion of this theme, see Arthur Waldron's article, "A Free and Democratic China?," in the November 2000 COMMENTARY, as well as the correspondence on it beginning on page 12 of this issue—ED.

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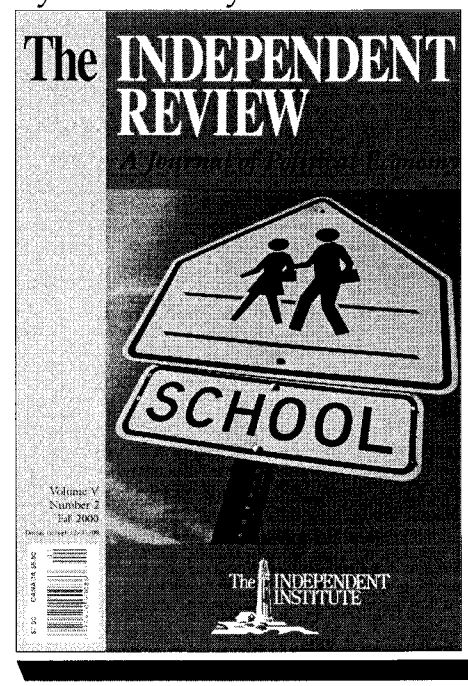

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its efforts to use economic instruments for achieving strategic objectives. This is true, but it is also largely beside the point. The use of such instruments may not be an entirely new thing under the sun, but it is a new thing for China. The question is toward what ends, and how effectively, China will employ its newfound leverage.

As I suggested in my article, a fast-growing China may try to use its increasing weight to constrict America's influence in Asia, while at the same time reducing its own vulnerability to American economic pressures. Whether or not the Chinese will be able to carry this off remains to be seen. But the larger point is worth repeating: dealing with a strategic competitor that has significant economic cards to play will present new challenges to the United States.

James R. Lilley notes that its economic links with Taiwan may have a restraining influence on mainland China. This is an important point and one that is often lost in abstract, general discussions of the allegedly pacifying effects of global economic interdependence. But the situation prevailing across the Taiwan Strait also underlines the plausibility of international relationships that mix a measure of economic cooperation with a strong strain of strategic competition. This too is something foreign to our recent experience.

During the cold war, we became accustomed to the idea that the world could be divided cleanly into two camps: friends who were both our military allies *and* our principal trading partners, and foes with whom we competed militarily and traded hardly at all. Mixed relations, however, are far closer to the historical norm. To take one troubling example: prior to the outbreak of the World War I, Britain and Germany were among each other's most important trading partners. Dealing effectively with China will require us to broaden our conceptual categories, instead of trying, as we have been doing for the better part of the last decade, to deny the PRC's competitive behavior in order to squeeze it into the "friendly" box.

Rivalry is not inevitable, but our actions could help make it so.

Is an intense, open struggle for mastery in Asia inevitable? No, and I said so as clearly as I could at the beginning and again at the end of my essay. Although I believe that, especially in the military realm (and, in a more muted way, in the diplomatic and economic domains) a competition of sorts is already under way, I do not think it is somehow destined to accelerate or to blossom in all the ways that I speculate it could.

Might we, through *our* behavior, make an intense rivalry more likely? To one degree or another, Victor D. Cha, Zalmay Khalilzad, Dov Zakheim, Richard J. Ellings, and Michael O'Hanlon all worry about the possibility of creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. Treat China as an enemy, says the conventional wisdom, and it will become one.

There is something to this line of reasoning, though not, in my view, as much as is usually claimed. For one thing, there may be powerful internal forces— political, ideological, and bureaucratic—propelling China toward a more confrontational stance, regardless of how inoffensive and accommodating we try to be. China may become an enemy even if we redouble our efforts to treat it as a friend.

Also deserving closer scrutiny is the notion that only by taking a soft line can we discourage aggressive external behavior and promote desirable domestic change. The history of our dealings with the Soviet Union during the latter stages of the cold war would certainly suggest otherwise (although the two situations differ in many respects). To the current Chinese leadership, we need to make clear the futility of stepped-up competition (to say nothing of overt aggression), while at the same time making plain to the Chinese people the benefits of continuing economic and political liberalization.

It is for these reasons that I favor a mixed approach along the lines laid out by Mr. Khalilzad: continued trade and investment—albeit with renewed steps to slow China's efforts to acquire certain key technologies—combined with serious, sustained, and unchecked efforts to strengthen our alliances, improve our military capabilities, and maintain a balance of power in Asia that is favorable to our interests. Engagement, yes; but from a position of strength.

Is it possible, finally, that merely by talking and perhaps even by *thinking* about a full-blown Sino-American rivalry we may increase the probability of its actually coming to pass? This is the clear implication of Michael Swaine's letter. Mr. Swaine worries that "ordinary observers," unable to distinguish between descriptions of present reality and "hair-raising scenarios" of the future, will conclude that "an intense geostrategic rivalry is virtually inevitable, and . . . respond accordingly."

While I am flattered by the thought that my article could somehow change the course of history, I very much doubt that it, or a hundred more like it, will have any such effect. On the other hand, I am disturbed by the suggestion that we ought to avoid discussing unpleasant possibilities for fear that someone (presumably our political representatives and "ordinary" fellow citizens) might get the wrong idea. Acknowledging real dangers is a necessary first step to avoiding them, as well as to preparing to cope with them if they should nevertheless come to pass. Refusing or neglecting to do so, it seems to me, is a far more likely formula for disaster.

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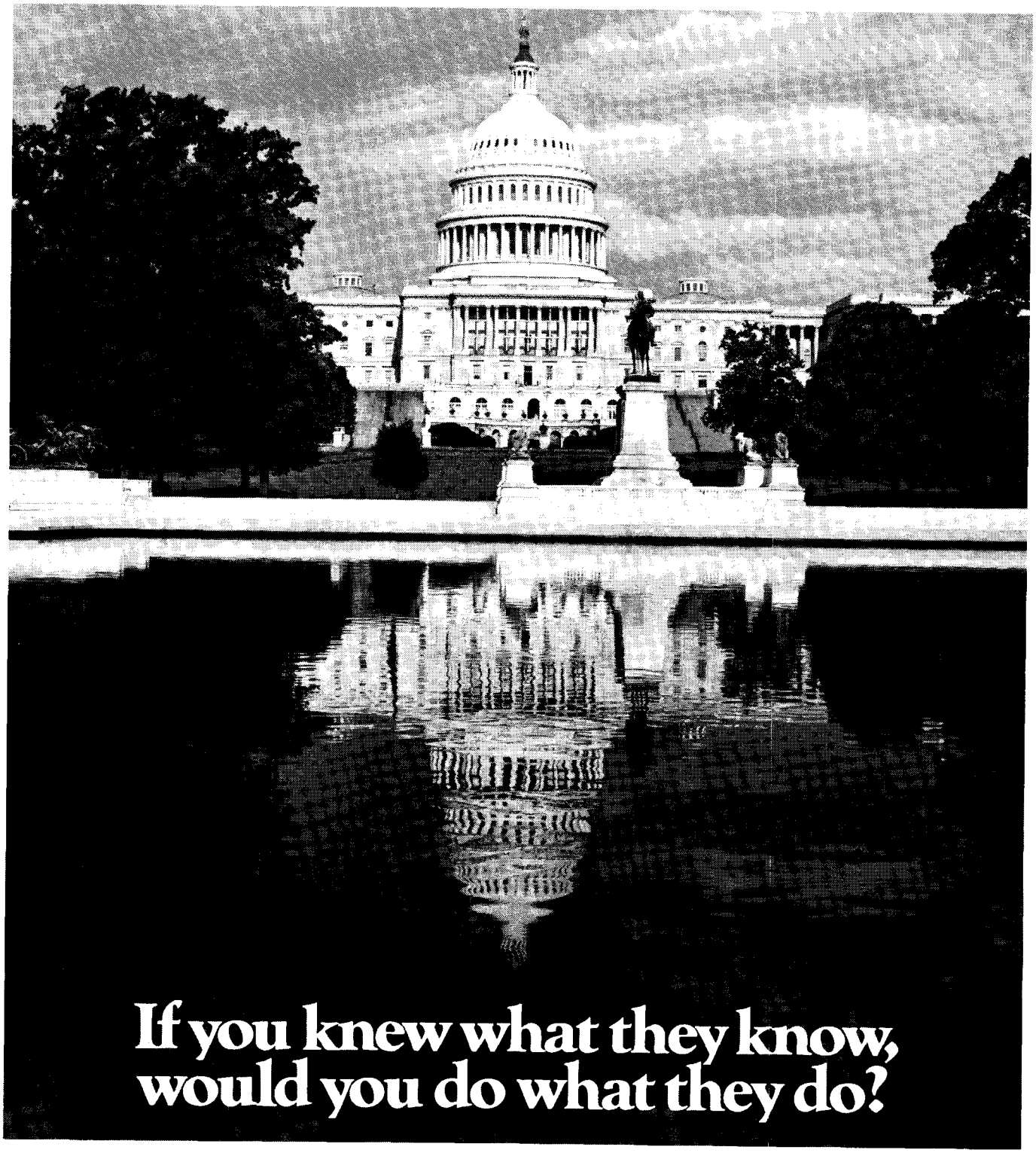

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Commentary
February 2001

Bush, Missile Defense, and the Critics

Frank J. Gaffney, Jr.

THIS PAST September, President Bill Clinton, having repeatedly resisted a congressional mandate to deploy an antiballistic missile system, announced that he would defer to his successor any decision on National Missile Defense (NMD). As things fell out, that successor, George W. Bush, was elected on a platform calling explicitly for the deployment—"at the earliest possible time"—of a comprehensive, effective, and global missile defense.

And so a debate that has raged off and on for almost twenty years has once again resumed. Within days of the final vote in the Electoral College this past December, the *New York Times*, a determined and long-time opponent of missile defenses, was editorializing that the "incoming Bush administration risks making an early mistake if it rushes to build" a national system. Instead, the paper urged that nothing whatsoever be done on this front until Russia, China, and "Washington's main European allies" are all brought on board, and above all that nothing be done until the "technology [of missile defense] is perfected"—something the paper assured its readers was far from being the case. The *Times* returned to this theme with redoubled alarm upon the announcement later in the month that Donald Rumsfeld, known for his "recent close association with the campaign for early construction of a national missile-defense system," was the President-elect's choice for Secretary of Defense.

As, and if, the new President moves to fulfill his campaign pledge, we can expect to hear many more such protests—not just from newspaper editorial boards but from policy analysts, associations of scientists, Senators and Congressmen, and the obligatory lineup of arms-control "experts." Yet a review of the arguments likely to be mustered against NMD suggests that, far from there being grounds for further inaction, the case for deployment is more compelling than ever.

II

ONE QUESTION the debate over missile defenses will probably *not* revolve around is whether there is a threat to defend against. Not even the *Times* seems to doubt that there is such a threat, or that it is growing.

Indeed, ever since a bipartisan commission chaired by Donald Rumsfeld released its findings in July 1998, relatively few critics of NMD have contended that we have nothing to fear. The Rumsfeld panel was chartered by Congress in response to the steady accretion of intelligence from countries hostile to the United States, suggesting that the missile menace was emerging much more

FRANK J. GAFFNEY, JR. *is president of the Center for Security Policy in Washington, D.C. His article on the proliferation of chemical and biological weapons, "Making the World Safe for VX," appeared in the October 1998* COMMENTARY. *Mr. Gaffney was responsible for missile-defense policy in the Reagan Defense Department.*

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rapidly than had previously been assumed. Not only did the commission confirm these "concerted efforts . . . to acquire ballistic missiles with biological or nuclear payloads," it warned that the nations in question "would be able to inflict major destruction on the U.S. within about five years of a decision to acquire such a capability." It also raised the worry that, on account of the erosion in our own intelligence-gathering abilities, "the U.S. might well have little or no warning before [the weapons'] operational deployment."

The timeliness of the Rumsfeld panel's findings was underscored, a month after the release of the report itself, when North Korea unexpectedly launched over Japan's home islands a ballistic missile more sophisticated than anything it was thought to possess. Today, Pyongyang may well be capable of fielding a missile that can strike a wide arc of territory in the continental U.S. Worse, North Korea regards ballistic missiles as an export commodity, one of the few things the country produces that can provide its bankrupt regime with infusions of hard cash. Even its dictator, Kim Jong-Il, has acknowledged that his country is selling missile technology to other rogue nations.*

Among the nations expanding the range of their ballistic missiles, the following are of particular concern:

Iran. Tehran has been conducting a series of flight tests of the Shahab-3, a missile with a range of 800 miles that is believed to have been derived from an older North Korean design. While the latest test apparently failed shortly after lift-off, there is every reason to believe that the regime will continue its pursuit of missile capability all the way to deployment. The Rumsfeld commission reported that "Iran has acquired and is seeking . . . components that can be combined to produce ballistic missiles with sufficient range to strike the United States." As for the payload that might be mounted on such missiles, the commission asserted that Tehran was close to developing nuclear weapons but "the U.S. is unlikely to know whether Iran possesses [such] weapons until after the fact."

Libya. According to a recent report in the (London) *Sunday Telegraph*, Libya has completed its own missile deal with North Korea, secretly taking delivery of the first of 50 missiles and seven mobile launchers. (The consignment was effected after several earlier attempts to ship components were intercepted by British and Indian authorities.) In the words of the *Telegraph*, "The North Koreans have also agreed to construct in Libya the infrastructure necessary for maintaining and storing the missiles, and to train the Libyans in all aspects of missile technology over a period of five years."

Syria. To their existing arsenal of Scud missiles, the Syrians have now reportedly added North Korean ground-to-ground Scud-D missiles, with a longer range and greater mobility. These will enable Syria to hold Israel at risk from a much larger area, making it commensurately more difficult to eliminate such missiles prior to their launch.

Iraq/Sudan. According to published reports, North Korea has also opened a franchise operation in Sudan, where it is building a Scud production facility in league with Iraq. If such a facility comes on-line, one can safely posit an even wider proliferation of ballistic missiles in Africa, the Middle East, and beyond.

These are the more or less agreed-upon facts. Virtually everything else—from the implications of the emerging threat to what the United States should do about it—is the subject of dispute.

III

CRITICS OF missile defense often begin with the assertion that building more weapons of *any* kind, offensive or defensive, is an inferior means of addressing the problem of arms proliferation. Far preferable, they say, to use the instrument of negotiated international agreements, on the model of the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Nuclear Nonproliferation treaty, or the bilateral Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty signed by President Richard Nixon and the Soviet Union's Leonid Brezhnev in 1972. This last accord in particular is held to be the very "cornerstone of strategic stability," as well as a legally binding obligation from which the United States must not deviate except by formal agreement with the Kremlin.

The central provision of the ABM treaty explicitly prohibits the development, deployment, or operation of territorial defenses against long-range ballistic missiles. At the time the treaty was negotiated, the idea behind this provision was that the way to ensure the joint security of the United States and the Soviet Union was to make both sides absolutely vulnerable to missile attack. Behind *this* idea lay, on the American side, considerations both practical and theoretical.

The practical consideration was that the Nixon administration had been encountering serious difficulties in its efforts to mobilize congressional sup-

* Although Bill Clinton persisted in believing that he could talk Kim out of continuing these programs, the North's track record to date would suggest otherwise.

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port for a national antimissile system. By banning outright what it could not in any event get built, the administration hoped to consolidate support for at least a single complex to defend a nuclear missile site in North Dakota. In the event, even that support failed to materialize.

The theoretical consideration—which took precedence in the minds of many policy-makers both at the time and thereafter—was the cold-war doctrine of arms control that came to be known as mutual assured destruction (MAD). The theory held that if each side's territory and population were hostage to the certainty of intolerably massive damage in a second, retaliatory strike, first strikes would be ruled out as well, and there would thus emerge a state of reciprocal deterrence. A corollary asserted that MAD would eventually permit substantial reductions in the two sides' arsenals.

It was not until 1983 that Ronald Reagan revisited the wisdom of continued U.S. adherence to the ABM treaty. He did so in part because, instead of reducing their arsenals during the intervening years, both sides had expanded them. The USSR, in particular, had deployed a succession of land-based missiles with large numbers of independently targetable warheads; these were of sufficient accuracy to cause successive U.S. administrations to believe that the Kremlin was seeking an overwhelming first-strike advantage sufficient to deny us the necessary capability to retaliate. It was first and foremost to exclude this Soviet option that, in March 1983, Reagan launched the antimissile program that came to be known as the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI).

Although the aim of SDI was to protect the American people from the scourge of nuclear attack, Reagan undertook it without formally abandoning either the theory of mutual assured destruction or the treaty that enshrined it. As a result, both during Reagan's tenure and up until the present day, U.S. missile-defense programs have been conducted within the confines of an accord designed to ensure that no effective missile-defense system will ever be developed.

It is difficult to overstate the stultifying effect this arrangement has had on the design, testing, and deployment even of shorter-range (i.e., non-"strategic") systems that were not supposed to be subjected to the ABM treaty's constraints, such as the Patriot, the Theater High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD), and other programs. As for weapons capable of performing truly strategic or intercontinental antimissile functions, the treaty prohibited outright several of the options the new President may want to explore, including sea-, air-, and space-based systems, as well as mobile (or non-fixed) ground-based ones. The ABM treaty also severely restricted the way in which tests could be performed on fixed, ground-based interceptors—the only type of antimissile systems whose deployment was permitted, albeit at just one location on each signatory's soil.

In short, the ABM treaty was designed to make it exceedingly difficult—if not, as a practical matter, impossible—to demonstrate legally that effective antimissile systems were achievable. In that objective, it succeeded. This, in turn, is what has enabled critics to argue that we should not abandon a treaty that "works" in favor of a defense system that has not shown it can.

Thankfully, in American political circles there is a growing recognition that the ABM treaty is a relic of another era—"outdated," in the words of Senator Joseph Lieberman, who in October 1999 pointed out correctly that "the danger now is more from rogue nations" unbound by any treaty than from the former Soviet Union. And even where the latter is concerned, compelling evidence has accumulated that, both then and now, the ABM treaty has conspicuously failed to constrain the Kremlin. Drawing upon recently declassified materials and on the memoirs of the men who designed the Soviet Union's antimissile and air-defense systems, William T. Lee, a retired intelligence analyst, has scrupulously documented the former USSR's successful pursuit of protection against American offensive weapons, not only for the region around Moscow (permitted under the treaty) but for the entirety of its territory. This was achieved by complementing the Moscow ABM site with successive generations of widespread warning and tracking radars networked with some 10,000 surface-to-air interceptors capable of bringing down both planes and longer-range missiles. That defense capability remains in place in Russia today, even as, in the United States, the ABM treaty continues to thwart the deployment of antimissile systems for the American homeland.

What is more, as the legal scholars Douglas J. Feith and George Miron have shown, there is no substance to the contention that the United States still has an international legal obligation to an accord whose other party has ceased to exist. The only way we could still be bound by the ABM treaty's limitations, wrote James Woolsey, Clinton's first CIA director, last August, would be if the U.S. Senate were to approve it all over again, together

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with changes made necessary by the USSR's demise; otherwise, "there is nothing to abrogate."

To be sure, none of this convinces the critics, who point to agreements signed during the Reagan and Bush administrations—the Intermediate-range Nuclear Force (INF) treaty and the START I and II treaties, as well as the START III negotiations pursued by President Clinton—as evidence that the ABM accord does indeed work, functioning as a kind of umbrella under which both sides have eliminated hundreds of offensive nuclear missiles against which no defense need now be mounted. The Russians, for their part, have explicitly tied their adherence to these various arms-control accords to continued U.S. fealty to the ABM treaty. The current Russian president, Vladimir Putin, actually threatened at one point to abandon *all* of Russia's arms-control obligations if the U.S. went ahead with even a limited national missile-defense system. It was this threat that Clinton translated into an effective veto over the start of construction of an NMD site in Alaska—and that critics of missile defense cite in arguing that President Bush must eschew any option other than what might be permissible under a "renegotiated" ABM treaty.

But Russia's threats to break out of its other agreements need not be accepted at face value. Indeed, General Vladimir Yakovlev, the commander of Russia's strategic rocket forces, has recently signaled that the Kremlin might be willing after all to accommodate itself to an American NMD deployment, even while making it clear that his country will extract whatever concessions it can for going along. Contrary to their own previous representations, and to the fears of many others, the Russians are evincing a pragmatism born of the same dire financial straits that have precluded them from retaining a cold-war-sized inventory of nuclear-armed missiles. If the choice is between acceding to an American defensive capability and destroying strategic arrangements with us that continue to serve their interests, there can be little doubt that they will choose the former.

IV

THE RUSSIANS' response to a U.S. missile defense is not the only one that alarms the critics, some of whom believe that NMD would serve to detach the U.S. from its allies in Europe and around the world.

European leaders have indeed expressed concern over the Clinton scheme for missile defense—and not without reason. After all, the Alaska deployment to which they were being asked to lend their support—in some cases by agreeing to deploy or upgrade fixed radar installations on their own territory—was not only highly controversial in the United States itself but also ran counter to the arms-control orthodoxy they embraced at home: namely, that in a nuclear world the desired state of being is defenselessness. Worse yet, the administration's system would protect only the United States, a prospect that drove even pro-American Europeans like Josef Joffe, co-editor of the German weekly *Die Zeit*, to complain that, in pursuing NMD, Washington was doing violence to its alliance relationships.

Obviously a program that appears likely to "decouple" this country from European security concerns, while also creating inviting targets on allied soil, makes little sense. This is not to say, however, that a different approach to U.S. missile defenses—one that would lend itself directly to the task of defending allied territory as well as our own—would necessarily meet a similar reaction. A case in point would be a sea-based system. More than $50 billion has already been invested by the U.S. navy in building and deploying all over the world some 55 Aegis cruisers and destroyers. Thanks to their air-defense mission, these ships carry the missile launchers, sensors, communications systems, and even the personnel needed to begin providing a global infrastructure for missile defense. They could be fairly rapidly modified to start protecting both U.S. forces and U.S. allies overseas, as well as the American people here at home. I shall have more to say about this "Aegis option" below.

Critics also worry that deploying a truly national missile-defense system would spark an arms race with the People's Republic of China, which has joined its "strategic partner," Russia, in vociferously denouncing any such deployment. The reason is obvious: Beijing has no desire to see its currently modest arsenal—roughly a score of long-range, nuclear-armed ballistic missiles—rendered "impotent and obsolete" (in Ronald Reagan's phrase). And so, despite the Clinton administration's reassurances that the fledgling Alaska deployment would be unable to stop even China's relatively small nuclear force, the Chinese have threatened to build up that force if the United States proceeds with NMD.

The truth of the matter, however, is that the PRC has long since embarked upon an ambitious plan to increase both the quality and the quantity of its long-range missile inventory, and is unlikely to be swayed one way or the other by the defensive

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actions of the U.S. What *might* make a difference would be a slowing of the technological assistance and financial underwriting Beijing has been obtaining for its ballistic-missile programs from us and other Western sources. A decision to stop enabling that effort, together with the deployment of effective U.S. defenses, would do far more to retard Beijing's effort to enhance its offensive threat than a stand-down on NMD. The same goes, of course, for other "rogue states" far less able than China to purchase or develop offensive forces.

Which leads to another consideration that seems to have eluded those who believe that the United States can continue to deter nuclear attacks on its soil through the threat of massive retaliation. As former Clinton Defense Secretary William Perry once observed, some of our potential adversaries may well be "undeterrable." It is not clear, for example, that the prospect of assured retaliation would dissuade attacks by Islamic extremists like the mullahs of Iran, who urge martyrdom upon their adherents with promises that meeting one's death while killing infidels will earn a reward in paradise. At the very least, missile defense would serve as an insurance policy in the event of a failure of deterrence against the likes of Saddam Hussein, Muammar Qaddafi, or Kim Jong-Il.

V

BUT CAN missile defenses ever be truly effective? Leading critics argue that they cannot: the task of "hitting a bullet with a bullet" is simply beyond the capability of today's scientists and engineers. At a minimum, they contend, the technology remains unproven. To the limited extent that tests have *seemed* successful, some critics charge, they have been insufficiently realistic or challenging, and/or the promoters of NMD have deliberately misrepresented actual performance results.

Basically, two technical challenges are involved in creating an effective defense against ballistic-missile attack: 1) designing, engineering, and manufacturing all of the component parts so that they will work together reliably; and 2) contending with countermeasures (decoys, chaff, mylar balloons, etc.) intended to confuse, overwhelm, or otherwise prevent the interception of an incoming warhead.

Opponents of missile defenses were quick to claim that the ground-based system being developed by the Clinton administration was incapable of meeting the first challenge, let alone the second, when the two most recent flight tests failed to intercept their targets. Both experiments were indeed disappointments, but the results were less damning than the critics suggest.

In the earlier of the two tests, the reason the "kill vehicle" did not smash into a simulated warhead as intended was that a sensor-cooling mechanism had stopped working in the final seconds of flight. This minor technical failure should not obscure the fact that the interceptor had successfully flown thousands of miles and had come within 200 feet of its target; in other words, the rest of the system worked very well indeed, and, absent this one malfunction, the kill vehicle would likely have performed its mission perfectly.

The more recent test apparently failed for an even more prosaic reason: the interceptor's second and third stages did not separate as required, thus aborting the test altogether. But this, too, tells us nothing about the feasibility of an NMD system. The United States mastered the challenge of rocket "separation" some 50 years ago, and there is no reason to doubt our ability to minimize any repetition of the defect in future tests or in operational deployments. Confidence is all the more justified in light of one other fact—namely, that the very first of the flight tests of the NMD system did perform a successful interception of its target.

Naturally, critics have challenged that test, too. Theodore Postol of MIT has even accused the Pentagon of "systematically lying," of rigging its tests to ensure success—especially by not including the countermeasures that might confront a deployed U.S. system—and of covering up identified technical shortcomings. The Pentagon has vehemently rejected these charges, asserting plausibly enough that NMD has simply followed the standard practice of most development programs (and, for that matter, most human endeavors): namely, starting with less ambitious objectives and only then proceeding to more daunting tasks.

Interestingly, an advisory panel of experts chaired by General Larry Welch—whose past criticisms, principally of the pace of NMD development, are often cited by Postol and others—urged that *no* countermeasures of any kind be incorporated in the system's first intercept tests in order to keep them as simple as possible. Nor does the Welch panel's most recent (and still classified) report, issued last June, appear to bear out the harshest of the critiques leveled by Postol and his colleagues. An unnamed senior administration official characterized that report in an interview with the *Washington Post* as giving the Pentagon "a 'B-plus grade for work done thus far' and . . . an overall blessing to the plans drawn up for future testing and evalu-

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ation." Added the official, "It is like remodeling a kitchen: it may not get done [by the date promised], but it will get done."

This brings us to the second challenge: discriminating between nuclear warheads and whatever "penetration aids" an adversary might introduce as countermeasures. One obvious way to address this task is to perfect our "hit-to-kill" technology: that is, to ensure that our interceptors do actually collide with and destroy the right targets. In general, thanks to our technological edge, we are well-positioned to prevail in such measure-versus-countermeasure contests, a fact that in itself may discourage at least some would-be proliferators from trying to build or upgrade their limited offensive capabilities.

This is especially true insofar as there are real obstacles to fielding such countermeasures. Some of those obstacles have been outlined, in response to Postol's criticisms, by Thad Cochran, the Mississippi Republican who chairs the Senate Proliferation Subcommittee. Not only, Cochran noted, are countermeasures subject to the same scientific reality as the weapons systems they are intended to frustrate—namely, they are "relatively easy to conceive" but quite another matter altogether to transform "from the realm of ideas into hardware"—but other factors come into play as well:

> [C]ountermeasures aren't free. Every countermeasure which someone attempts to put on a ballistic missile costs real money. Countermeasures also consume weight and space, which means lowered performance or less payload. Countermeasures introduce complexity, which means more things can go wrong and engineers must spend more time trying to ensure they go right. Engineers trying to perfect countermeasures are diverted from other activities they could be working on, such as extending a missile's range or improving its reliability. In short, successful pursuit of countermeasures means sacrificing something else, and some may not choose to make that sacrifice.

Aside from better hit-to-kill interceptors and effective discrimination techniques, the United States has other options as well. Most desirable of all would be the development and fielding of "boost-phase" systems—that is, defenses capable of destroying ballistic missiles in the earliest, powered portion of their trajectory. At that stage they are moving most slowly; they are easily detected and tracked with infrared sensors; and, because they are full of highly combustible liquid or solid fuel, they are exceedingly vulnerable to attack. Best of all, they have not yet deployed their warheads and whatever penetration aids they may be carrying. The prospect that the chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons contained in these warheads may come crashing down upon the launcher's own territory could be a singularly persuasive deterrent to initiating an attack.

Boost-phase interceptions can be most efficiently accomplished from space. The United States has the technology in hand or under development to put "kinetic-kill" weapons and lasers into orbit, from where they can locate, track, and destroy missiles during their boost phase, irrespective of the launch point around the world. Properly configured and situated sea-based systems may be able to perform some boost-phase interceptions as well.

Another, less desirable option is to adopt the "brute force" method. The original U.S. and Soviet antiballistic-missile programs relied upon interceptors equipped with small nuclear weapons—and so does the system the Russians have deployed today. By detonating such a device outside the atmosphere, in close proximity to the incoming warhead and its "cloud" of accompanying penetration aids, one can be confident that both the real reentry vehicle and everything masquerading as it will be destroyed.

Concerns about utilizing nuclear weapons in such a role were among the reasons the United States abandoned its limited Safeguard ABM program in 1974, several months after it became operational. They have also been a driving force behind the effort since 1983 to find nonnuclear kill mechanisms. Still, against a prospective attack by a chemical, biological, or nuclear weapon-tipped missile, any and all steps need to be considered. And, as with boost-phase defenses, one cannot rule out the possibility that the possession of such systems could in itself act powerfully to deter an adversary contemplating an attack against us.

IT BEARS repeating that the technical challenges to NMD have been greatly, and unnecessarily, compounded by the special constraints under which the missile-defense program has operated from the start. Past challenges of comparable difficulty—building the first atomic bomb, or the first space-launch vehicles, or nuclear-powered submarines—were accorded the highest national priority; in the face of reverses, and there were many, the response was to redouble the effort and to increase the resources required for it. The opposite has been more nearly the case with NMD, a program not only hobbled by our adherence to the

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ABM treaty but vociferously opposed at every step of the way by the arms-control community and its sympathizers.

Rightly so, a determined critic might insist. For, he would maintain, the claims made on behalf of NMD are very grand, and the projected expense connected with such a system is enormous. And for what? Even the best defense would likely have *some* leakage—a fact that, for a nation relying on it, could well prove catastrophic. A system that is less than absolutely perfect may not be worth having at all, such a critic would conclude, and a system that is absolutely perfect is not to be had.

In fact, missile defense was never conceived by its planners in the utopian terms its scoffers like to evoke, and the idea that only infallible weapons merit development and deployment flies in the face of all of military history. In Operation Desert Storm, American forces and U.S. allies alike made it clear that they preferred some defense against ballistic missiles to none at all. Besides, an adversary contemplating an attack in the face of even partially effective defenses could never know whether his warheads would succeed in reaching their targets and, if so, which ones they would be. This in itself may create an additional disincentive to launching a strike in the first place—particularly if the consequences of doing so would be certain and devastating retaliation by a still wholly or mainly unscathed United States.

Yet, a critic might now counter, even if we somehow could field *perfect* missile defenses, the whole exercise would be useless against attack by means other than missiles. Our porous borders permit the bringing-in of all sorts of weapons of mass destruction via airplane, ship, or truck—perhaps, it has been sarcastically suggested, even inside a bale of marijuana.

Indisputably, the United States is at risk of non-missile attack by terrorists and their state sponsors, and is hardly better equipped against such attacks today than it is against the missile-borne kind. This, however, is an argument for improving our defenses against all these threats; it is hardly an argument for leaving ourselves vulnerable to ballistic missiles. Prudent homeowners purchase insurance against both fire and theft.

There is, in this connection, another aspect to the missile threat: its political utility. Whereas terrorists, in order credibly to blackmail or coerce, must be active and overt, states with missiles can blackmail and coerce just by retaining credible capabilities. This has long been evident to the People's Republic of China, whose senior officials on several occasions have reminded their American counterparts of China's ability to use nuclear-armed missiles against American cities in the event we came to the aid of Taiwan in a Sino-Taiwanese conflict. Sure enough, our response has been placatory; we have emphasized and strengthened our ties to Beijing and distanced ourselves from our democratic allies in Taipei. Similarly, the mere fact of North Korea's missile programs has secured for Pyongyang international standing, diplomatic blandishments, technology, and hundreds of millions of dollars in food, oil, and other assistance from Washington.

The lesson is not lost on other rogue states contemplating our defenselessness. How long will it go on being lost on us?

VI

In principle, the new President has a number of options available to him if he means to honor his commitment to protect the American people and U.S. forces and allies overseas "at the earliest possible time."

Those options include, obviously, the ground-based system President Clinton had under development, which called for an initial deployment of up to 100 surface-to-air missile interceptors in Alaska. The Clinton plan also contemplated an eventual second deployment at another location to ensure coverage of all U.S. states and territories.

For the purposes of detection and tracking, these weapons would rely upon a network of large radars in the United States—including one on the Aleutians' barren Shemya Island—and, as we have seen, on allied territory elsewhere around the world. Even though this system was designed to be of very limited scope—the initial deployment would be capable of defending against only a handful of simultaneously incoming warheads and provide protection only to parts of the United States—its cost would be substantial: according to an estimate by the Congressional Budget Office, the first site would require approximately $60 billion to build and operate over the next fifteen years.

Other options include an airborne laser aboard modified Boeing commercial aircraft; space-based infrared and other sensors; and orbiting lasers or kinetic-kill weapons that would be able to destroy incoming missiles and/or warheads during their boost phase or in mid-course. And then there is the Aegis option: a sea-based deployment using the infrastructure offered by the navy's Aegis fleet and weapons currently being developed to intercept shorter-range missiles.

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A truly robust capability, of the sort pledged by Bush while he was running for office, would probably involve some combination of these systems. Depending on the precise composition of such a "layered" defense, the associated costs for acquisition and operation could either be less or considerably more than the $60 billion estimated for the Clinton-proposed system alone.

As a practical matter, however, only the Aegis option holds out much prospect of a near-term, flexible, effective, and affordable defense. The opportunity to provide such an alternative relatively quickly, and, thanks to the navy's prior investment, at a fraction of the cost of the Clinton program, is what presumably contributed to Bush's favorable mention of the Aegis option in the course of the campaign. It would make a great deal of sense to press forward on this front, particularly in light of Colin Powell's worrisome suggestion, following his selection as Bush's choice for Secretary of State, that the Pentagon be asked to undertake a comprehensive and, of necessity, time-consuming examination of all available technologies. Given how fast midterm electioneering will begin, and given inertia, bureaucratic foot-dragging, and the accumulated powers of the nay-sayers, the President has a narrow window within which to act if the nation is not to remain vulnerable to missile attack for the foreseeable future.

If it were to fulfill Bush's promise, the administration would serve notice immediately that, in six-months' time, the United States will start the process of deploying missile defenses—at first, under the Aegis option, from the sea. It would, of course, take some time to complete this process. The initial systems would have limited, if any, capability against most fast-flying, long-range ballistic missiles. They would, however, be effective against shorter-range missile threats to our troops and friends overseas. By authorizing such sums as are needed immediately out of existing missile-defense funds, preparing to secure additional funding from Congress on an emergency basis, and mandating that streamlined acquisition procedures be followed, the President could ensure a measure of protection as soon as is technologically possible.

In so doing, Bush would be fulfilling the requirements of the Missile Defense Act of 1999, which was passed by overwhelming Republican and Democratic majorities in the Senate and House and signed into law by President Clinton. What is more, the Aegis approach has been endorsed by several prominent Democrats, including former Secretary of Defense Harold Brown and former Deputy Secretaries of Defense John White and John Deutch. It has likewise won the support of a number of congressional Democrats, as well as leading Republicans like Senator John McCain.

This announcement of an early start to deployment would also effectively notify the world that we are dispensing once and for all with the obsolete, legally defunct, and increasingly dangerous Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty. It would do so, moreover, without suggesting that we consider the accord still legally binding by giving formal notice, pursuant to its provisions, of our intent to "withdraw."

It is past time, in short, to stop debating and start acting. Were the administration to proceed, it would no doubt find itself with a fight on its hands. But there is also little doubt that it would enjoy by far the better arguments, and that many in both political parties would rally to its side. The key is to begin, and "at the earliest possible moment."

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Who Needs Medical Ethics?

Sally Satel & Christine Stolba

INSTILLING IN doctors a strong commitment to do right by their patients has been a concern of the medical profession since antiquity. Indeed, the ancient Hippocratic Oath—with its pledge to "come for the benefit of the sick" and to refrain from divulging the confidences of patients or engaging in sexual relations with them—is still administered, in one form or another, to the graduates of most medical schools. The American Medical Association also has its own code of ethics, which dates back more than 150 years and includes, in its most updated version, thoughtful guidance on matters like fetal research and end-of-life care.

What is noteworthy about how such questions are handled today is the arrival on the scene of an entirely new sort of specialist: the medical ethicist. Professionals with this title—or the equivalent title of bio- or clinical ethicist—can now be found at the National Institutes of Health and the Public Health Service, on the health committees of Congress and the state legislatures, at biotechnology and managed-care companies, and of course at hundreds of clinics and hospitals.

What these designated advice-givers actually do varies from institution to institution. Where medical research is being conducted, they usually serve on review boards meant to ensure that human subjects give their informed consent and are not placed at unacceptable risk. At managed-care companies, they are often brought in to give their blessing—and thus, it is hoped, some protection against liability—to policies that might one day have to be defended in court.

More often, however, and more controversially, medical ethicists serve as "on-call" consultants at ordinary healthcare facilities, where they offer bedside guidance on issues ranging from the mental competence of patients to whether certain extraordinary treatments should be withheld or withdrawn. By playing this role—and doing so at ever more institutions—the professional practitioners of medical ethics have raised a host of questions, not only about their own expertise and authority but, ultimately, about the very nature of medical care.

LIKE SO many other recent social and cultural movements, the effort to make medical ethics into a specialty of its own emerged from the campus upheavals of the 1960's. In keeping with the activist spirit of the day, many professors of philosophy decided to leave behind the historical and technical questions that had long dominated their discipline. Instead, they turned their attention to what they called—often as a euphemism for political agitation—*applied* philosophy, a rubric that cov-

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ered, among many other things, the life-and-death problems posed by modern medical care. The idea, according to Daniel Callahan, one of the pioneers of bioethics, was to give philosophy "some social bite, some 'relevance.'"

Academics were not alone, however, in wanting to look more systematically at medical decision-making. Many physicians were interested as well, feeling that their work had become vastly more complicated—and more fraught with difficult moral issues—because of the advent of new technologies and treatments. At the same time, public concern over medical ethics was growing. Revelations in the early 1970's about the U.S. government's Tuskegee study—in which hundreds of Alabama sharecroppers with syphilis went untreated—fueled the perception that the profession warranted scrutiny. Questions about the limits of medical authority were raised, too, by the 1975 case of Karen Ann Quinlan, a young New Jersey woman kept alive on a respirator after lapsing into a coma. In a much-publicized decision, the state's Supreme Court eventually ruled that her father, despite her physician's opposition, could have the respirator removed.

As a result of these various developments, the 1960's and 70's witnessed a remarkable burst of institution-building among the newly self-proclaimed bioethicists and their medical collaborators. Scores of symposia, meetings, and conferences were held on issues like death and dying, organ transplantation, and new fertility techniques. More importantly, the first institutes devoted exclusively to the study of medical ethics were created, with funding from donors like the Rockefeller Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities. They were led by Daniel Callahan's Hastings Center for Bioethics, the Kennedy Institute of Ethics at Georgetown University, and the Society for Health and Human Values.

Nor was professional recognition for the new field long in coming. In 1992, the major accrediting agency for the nation's healthcare institutions mandated that all hospitals establish formal procedures for dealing with ethical issues arising from patient care. The decision seemed, in effect, to promise full employment for medical ethicists.

Today, the bioethics "industry," as insiders do not blush to call it, is booming. Some 50 universities in the U.S. now have academic centers focusing on medical ethics, and many more provide courses on the subject as part of their offerings in the humanities. The field has a number of publications of its own, including the *Journal of Clinical Ethics*, the *Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics*, and the *Hastings Center Report*, and the largest of its professional organizations, the American Society for Bioethics and Humanities, boasts some 1,600 members.

IF THE institutional stature of medical ethicists has increased dramatically in recent years, so too has their self-assurance. During the field's infancy, practitioners often exhibited a notable degree of modesty about their ambitions. As Daniel Callahan confessed in 1973, he "resisted with utter panic the idea of participating with the physicians in their actual decisions," much preferring "the safety of the profound questions I pushed on them."

Today such modesty is far less common. Albert Jonsen, who teaches bioethics at the medical school of the University of Washington in Seattle, likes to think of himself and those he trains not just as consultants, ready to provide advice when it is solicited, but as "doctor-watchers." As he describes his role at the hospital,

> I follow the little party of doctors, nurses, and medical students to the bedside of very sick people. I read patients' charts, talk about patients' ills, participate in discussions about patients' fates. Although I eschew the pretensions of a white coat and beeper, I admit to some gratification at being "inside." More than that, I believe that I have some right to be there and that my being there does some good to doctors and patients alike.

What this "good" amounts to, according to medical ethicists, is encouraging doctors to give full consideration to certain key principles in resolving clinical dilemmas. Among these principles are the traditional—if vague—obligation to act for their patients' benefit and to avoid harming them. In a more modern vein, doctors are urged to respect the "autonomy" of those whom they care for, which typically means obtaining their informed consent for any course of treatment.

A number of bioethicists have taken their mandate a step farther. Harking back to the activist origins of the field, they argue that the immediate clinical setting must be seen as just one part of the wider—and deeply unjust—American healthcare system, in which medical resources are unequally distributed and the special needs of minorities and women are ignored. The members of the International Network on Feminist Approaches to Bioethics, for example, aim to "develop a more inclu-

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sive theory of bioethics encompassing the standpoints and experiences of women and other marginalized social groups," believing as they do that many of the "presuppositions embedded in the dominant bioethical discourse . . . privilege those already empowered."

ARE ANY of these principles, from the modest to the politically ambitious, a worthy supplement to the demands of the Hippocratic Oath? For the most part, unfortunately, they are not, and for no more complicated reason than that they can lend themselves to outcomes that are far from self-evidently "ethical."

Feminist bioethics is especially problematic in this regard. Consider, for instance, one of the cases discussed by Mary Briody Mahowald of the University of Chicago in her recent book, *Genes, Women, Equality*.* According to Mahowald, a pregnant woman named Julia Smith Andre was told that because of her own metabolic disorder, she would have to follow a restrictive diet to keep her child from having serious birth defects. Andre refused to comply—and the child was born profoundly retarded.

Though it is unclear whether Andre could have been legally compelled to follow the doctor's prescription, the verdict on her behavior, as an *ethical* matter, would seem straightforward: she violated her duty to her unborn child. But not so fast, Mahowald insists. Feminist "standpoint" theory, she informs us, grants "privileged status to [Andre's] decision regarding diet," since Andre—at least in Mahowald's ideologically blinkered view of the situation—is "the person most affected."

No less potentially dangerous is the relentless emphasis of bioethicists on the idea of personal "autonomy"—that great shibboleth of modern liberal theory—even in cases when patients are plainly incapable of deciding matters for themselves. In 1996, a schizophrenic man named Thomas W. Passmore imagined that he saw "666"—the biblical symbol of the anti-Christ—on his right hand and, terrified, used a circular saw to cut off the offending limb. Surgeons at the hospital wanted to sew the hand back on, but Passmore, still in the grips of his psychosis, refused.

Was this delusional man quickly medicated with antipsychotic drugs and then rushed into the operating room? Alas, no. A group consisting of lawyers, psychiatrists, and a judge, acting in accordance with the dictates of medical ethics and in the name of "autonomy," decided to abide by Passmore's wishes: the demonic appendage was not reattached.

THE PRACTICAL issues that confront work-a-day clinical ethicists are not usually so extreme, of course. But even when it comes to the ordinary business of their profession, it is not at all clear what sort of specialized abilities or knowledge these trained "experts" bring to the hospital bedside.

In a study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, Ellen Fox and Carol Stocking of the University of Chicago asked more than 100 ethics consultants to review seven hypothetical vignettes involving a patient similar to Karen Ann Quinlan—that is, someone who showed no awareness of the outside world, was considered incapable of experiencing pain, and had virtually no chance of regaining consciousness. Fox and Stocking chose this clinical situation because it is the one most often confronted by medical ethicists. Moreover, they were careful to exclude messy, confounding details, thereby making the cases "more straightforward than [those] an ethics consultant typically encounters." Their finding: an almost complete lack of consensus. Indeed, for six of the seven cases, there was not even a majority response.

Explaining this astonishing result—which might be compared to discovering that 100 doctors had widely divergent opinions on how to handle an appendicitis—is hardly difficult. The fact is that there are few meaningful standards for bedside ethicists. Some are Ph.D.-level academics, others are lawyers, sociologists, or social workers, and still others are physicians or nurses. Nor is any particular course of study required to turn them into members of the ethicists' guild. Their training runs the gamut from years of specialized doctoral work to the completion of an "intensive" ten-day course, like the one offered annually at the Kennedy Institute of Ethics at Georgetown.

But the absence of professional standards is not the most serious problem afflicting the field; rather, it is the lack of any coherent idea of what even a properly educated medical ethicist might add to a difficult clinical situation. In 1998, the American Society for Bioethics and Humanities attempted to codify the profession's "core knowledge areas" and "core competencies." A clinical ethicist, the group suggested, should not only be familiar with such subjects as moral reasoning, health law, and the organization of the healthcare system, but should be able, among other things, to "engage in creative problem-solving," "listen well," "communicate interest and respect," and "distinguish ethical dimensions of [a] case from other overlapping dimensions."

* Oxford, 314 pp., $39.95.

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What is remarkable about this otherwise commonplace list is that such "core" responsibilities should be considered the special domain of medical ethicists. Are they really outside the purview of medical *doctors*?

HERE, OF course, is the rub. For despite the help that some bioethicists have occasionally provided in making tough medical decisions, there is no denying that their expanding role in American healthcare directly impinges on the traditional duties of physicians.

In the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, John La Puma, a physician, described a number of representative ethics consultations that took place in his hospital in the course of a year. One concerned the question of whether an alcoholic should receive a liver transplant; another involved a husband who, hoping for a "miracle," wanted aggressive measures taken to revive his irreversibly brain-dead wife.

Both cases were resolved satisfactorily, but one finishes La Puma's account wondering why it was necessary for an ethicist to be involved in either one. After all, determining whether a patient is a suitable candidate for a liver transplant is not an exotic clinical decision. The physician must determine whether the potential recipient is likely to stop drinking and stay sober, a process that entails learning something about the patient's character, drinking history, and social habits. Similarly, helping a husband understand his wife's dim prognosis is the sort of thing that physicians have always been expected to do, and have *wanted* to do, in fulfillment of the humane intentions that led them to choose medicine in the first place.

There are some doctors, to be sure, who welcome such intervention. A 1992 study found that physicians who requested ethics consultations found them "helpful" or "very helpful" in 86 percent of the cases. Others, no doubt, like the idea of sharing the responsibility—especially, if necessary, the legal responsibility—for the sort of emotionally trying decisions about which a patient's family might eventually have second thoughts.

But most doctors, it seems, harbor deep—and justifiable—reservations about having an "ethical" intermediary between themselves and their patients. Not only is it intrusive and time-consuming, but, as one physician told the authors of an article in the *Journal of Clinical Ethics*, it suggests "that the doctor is not sure," that "he's looking for affirmation elsewhere" and "can't make up his mind." Moreover, as one of his colleagues observed, by turning ethical questions into a specialty, medical institutions are practically inviting doctors "to shunt the responsibility away to a consultant."

THE GREATEST risk posed by today's growing cadre of medical ethicists is not that their advice will directly harm patients. Rather, it is that their presence in clinics and hospitals will tempt physicians to restrict their own job description, reserving to themselves the technical management of illness and injury while leaving the human side of the equation to the appointed "experts."

These twin aspects of doctoring are not so easily separated, however, as the Hippocratic Oath plainly recognizes. The knowledge at a physician's disposal can be used for good or ill, depending on his professional character. This has always been true, but its importance cannot be emphasized enough at a moment when medical technologies have vastly increased the options available for treating disease and prolonging life. What is urgently needed at the bedside of patients is not self-styled professional ethicists, but ethical doctors. Ghettoizing the moral side of medicine is not the way to produce them.

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Mistaking One Man for Another

A Story

Ellen Geist

I AM sitting in Goldstein's eating a kosher hot dog with Diane and loving every minute of it. It's the only really kosher, not "kosher-style," deli in Cambridge, conveniently located next to Mount Carmel Hospital. I'm the one who set up her husband Dominick with Kaminetzky in the nick of time before the doctors in my hometown of Springfield could kill him with their combination of arrogance and stupidity, and over lunch I am reaping the glory of my matchmaking. Dom has mylogenous leukemia, and Kaminetzky, who is my doctor, was glad to save his life to score points because he is in love with me. "No, that's not fair," I am telling Diane. "I take it back. He saved Dom's life, as he saved mine, because he is devoted to the cure of his patients." I am not sure how I feel about my doctor. I am in the process of reevaluation over lunch with Diane.

The thing that really knocks me out about the hot dogs at Goldstein's is the way the skin bunches at the end and separates from the dog itself in that special little jacket that they tie with a string. This imparts the crunch on the outside and the soft inner core. It's an effect that can't be duplicated with other methods. We used to get hot dogs like this near my grandmother's house at Beacon Beach when I was a kid, along with mint-chocolate-chip ice-cream cones, all dusted with a coating of sand and mixed with the aroma of beach tar.

Because it's been weeks since I've eaten meat, a hot dog tastes even better than I expected. A near brush with death and a series of unfulfilling surgical experiences in the past year have led me to discover the religious path, shopping different synagogues and trying out the dietary laws. The easiest way to keep kosher is to be a vegetarian, my mentor and current boyfriend, Aaron, has explained to me. That way, mixing milk with meat isn't even a consideration. I've been following the weekly Torah portion and I'd hit the segment on kashrut just in time for my cousin's wedding reception in San Francisco, beginning my conversion by heroically resisting even one of the 500 oysters my sister-in-law had smoked for the occasion. God urges us to the furthest point within the limits of what we can actually achieve, Aaron has explained. Aaron thinks God is trying to hint at vegetarianism by making us aware of the animal as a living creature: not cooking the animal in its mother's milk.

"So what about not eating shellfish? The little pincers? The exoskeleton? What does that have to do with not mixing life with death?" my cousin Roni asked me the other day on the phone. Aaron has been spiraling down in popularity as the reports of our newly developing relationship have been going out to family and friends, particularly to my favorite cousin Roni. She doesn't want to tell me outright to dump him, so she is using the

ELLEN GEIST, *here making her first appearance in* COMMENTARY, *has completed a novel,* Lehigh Parkway, *and is working on another,* Blue Zone, *based on the characters in this story.*

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method of critical investigation into his theories.

Now Diane wants the story of how Kaminetzky proposed to me. She's enamored of him since he saved her husband, and she is promoting his merits. "I think he's cute, actually," she is saying. "Intelligence always makes someone attractive."

It's been a long time since I told anyone this story, and thus it's crucial that I recall every detail in its exact order. My story begins on the day after the second node bio came back positive. I was sorry I had established a hotline with the pathologist because I got the news from him and not Kaminetzky.

"I love you," Kaminetzky said in his follow-up call.

"I love you, too," I answered matter-of-factly. Those days everyone was telling me they loved me. Friends I hadn't seen in years were calling and telling me they loved me. Ex-husbands, of whom I had two, were calling and saying they loved me. With a six-month-to-two-year prognosis, what did they have to lose? Just another country heard from, I thought when Kaminetzky called.

"No, I really do love you," he said. "I'm telling you, you're not going to die. Listen to me. I want you to live to a hundred and twenty. I'm not going to use a few perfunctory regimens of CMF at a low dose like these other guys, minimize the side effects, make everyone happy until, lo and behold, metastasis everywhere. I'm going to bring you right to the brink, use CAF and every other possible chemotherapy known to mankind until your white count is so low it's not countable and every cancer cell inside you is dead, and then I'll bring you back. Do you get it? Do you hear me? Do you have any idea how much I love you?"

"Chemo to the max," I replied. "Is that the new thrill? Kinda like the sex with a plastic bag over the head that's coming into vogue?"

"Don't be stupid," he said. "This is no joke."

"OK," I said. "I'll take the dreaded and despised Adriamyacin; I'll do the A in the CAF. Come on and zap me. But I'm not going to have an affair with you. Do you still want to save me?"

"You don't understand. I would never have an affair with you. If you would be with me, I would do the honorable thing. I would marry you."

"In my case," I said, "such commitment is easy. Might be a three-week gig, for all you know."

"If you think proposing to someone with your prognosis is easy, you're wrong. Don't make light of my feelings."

"Get a divorce first," I said. "Then we'll talk. That is, if I'm still around."

"Don't give me that. I would do anything for you. You don't have to say yes, but at least respect me enough to take my feelings seriously. Say you don't care for me, say you don't return my feelings, but don't give me this garbage about how it's because I'm married. I've seen your courage. If you loved me, nothing in the world would stop you; nothing in the world would get in your way."

"Oh," was all I said at the time.

"I would have gone for it," my friend Diane is saying.

I can't discuss this any more. I have to get ready to pick up Aaron at the airport. He's coming in on the shuttle from a Hesed House board meeting in New York. I'm cooking dinner, and he'll be meeting my eight-year-old daughter Sophie for the first time. I don't like to bring men to meet her unless it's serious; I try not to bring a lot of extraneous traffic through the house. The fact that I offered to pick him up and bring him home is a sure indication I've crossed that fateful line and decided he's the person for me. Once I make that decision, I immediately begin to suppress any evidence to the contrary. It's my downfall.

Aaron has been trying to instruct me in how to prepare Sabbath meals on time. Everything has to be actually cooked—transformed from one state to another—before sundown falls. He doesn't seem to grasp what a supreme sacrifice I'm making simply by entering a grocery store. I hate to cook, and I hate all activities associated with cooking. I hate deciding what to make. I hate buying groceries. I hate carrying them into the house.

Last Friday, dragging two huge grocery bags with my minus-its-lymph-nodes arm a half hour after the designated time, I told him, "You don't realize how difficult it is for me to do this. You don't realize how rarely I shop."

"Somehow that's not very reassuring, you know," he said, with that bitter, critical tone I've come to know and love in men.

But I fought back, and with a fury and articulateness hitherto unknown to myself. "Is this the meaning of *shabbes*? Is this what it's about? Food on time? Yelling at your designated other? Is this a taste of heaven?"

"You're right," he said. "You're so right. I love it when you argue me down." Then he put his arm around me and pulled me close, singing melodically for the angels of this Sabbath night to arrive and care for us, to come and make it all better.

AARON HAS been pressuring me to have sex with him. I am so dumb; I thought because he was religious we would sit in public places holding hands until marriage or at least for four dates min-

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imum. I thought these observant guys might pride themselves on the holy union, the mystical communion, unbreakable by death or disease, a concept with no small appeal to me lately. I should have known this was the one area in which, unlike the hardcore Orthodox types, guys like Aaron feel the Torah allows for a wide interpretation.

On our first date we went to a movie at my insistence—I wasn't about to just show up at his place as he'd suggested. "Now I'm insulted," he said afterward, "that you won't come back for coffee. Do you think I'm going to attack you? The only way you could redeem yourself is by saying you are so attracted to me that you couldn't control yourself if we went to my house."

Actually, at that moment I was having trouble imagining myself kissing him, though I believed in it, in theory. However, "I'm attracted to the *idea* of you" didn't seem to convey the necessary enthusiasm. "How about it would be difficult for both of us?" I conceded.

We sat chastely at his kitchen table and talked.

"When were you first attracted to me?" he wanted to know. He wanted me to say it was at the Hesed open house I had attended, but in truth I had been saddened by the crowd, annoyed with the speeches, and particularly depressed by the quantities of overcooked noodle dishes. I'd never eaten so much cold pasta in my life.

"At Yizkor service, the last day of Passover at Kehilath Israel," I told him. This one was a Conservative synagogue, with mixed seating. I'd found out that Judaism has these all-purpose memorial services where you can go and cry your eyes out for everyone you've lost: mother, father, martyrs, Holocaust victims. They're perfect for someone like me. So there I was crying, and I looked up and saw Aaron, whom I recognized from the Hesed House dinner, catching my eye in a moment, I thought, of complete recognition of who I was and all I'd gone through, a pure communion of souls. He had these touching circles under his eyes.

"Have you ever been in love?" he wanted to know. I was being interviewed for the girlfriend/future wife position. For once I gave the right answer.

"Looking back, not really," I said. "But when I saw you, I thought, here is someone I might truly love."

"That's really moving," he said. He sounded sincere. "But I wasn't at that Yizkor service."

"Are you sure?"

"Positive. I was giving a talk at Harvard Hillel that day."

Who was it, then? My *real* intended? "Maybe I should go back and check on who that was," I said. I didn't mean it, though. I knew if I went back I'd never find the guy again. He was a one-time messenger, an angel, a sign.

"I respect your need to go slow," Aaron explained to me. "And I think that's very important to your healing, to your learning how to protect yourself. I support you in sticking to your stand. . . ." He paused. "Even if it means losing me."

"OK, I'll stay," I said. "But we're not going all the way."

We didn't, but at his insistence we took off all our clothes and climbed under the bed sheets, a method of foreplay that doesn't particularly appeal to me. In line with my sexual development having been arrested at the seventh grade, I like starting with all your clothes on and then making out for hours. That's the best part, before having real sex ruins everything. Aaron and I slept all night next to each other, barely touching, like spoons. I figured the concession was worth it if it allowed him to trust me.

"I'm really into you," he said in the morning. "I've turned some kind of corner, and I'm just really open to you." Turning corners being a phase of relationships I am intimately familiar with, I knew just what he meant.

Now it's mid-afternoon and I pick up my daughter at school; we make a flurry of stops at breakneck speed, playing Beat the Clock. We stop at the fish store, the bread store, the vegetable market. I lug everything home. I've tried the recipe before, though that is not always, with me, foolproof. It's a fish stew with all sorts of goodies.

I'm nearly ready, an amazing accomplishment. The apartment is clean. The tape, a compilation I've made of the big hits of my teen years—"Heaven Must Have Sent You From Above," "Ain't No Mountain High Enough"—is set on just the right song. Sophie is psyched, not an easy state to get her in. But I still haven't heard from Aaron about when his plane will arrive. I know he's busy, but I feel uneasy. Just my luck: with everything going right for once, he'll cancel.

The phone rings and I jump, but it's not Aaron. It's Sophie's father calling long distance. I can't in all conscience force her to hang up on him. Luckily I reinstated call-waiting for just such a moment. "Do you know what to do if it beeps?" I ask Sophie anxiously.

"I think so," she says. "What do I do?"

"Press *Flash*," I say loudly. "Warn your father

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you might get a call. Explain to him I'm picking someone up at the airport and have to find out when."

She tells him, giving Aaron's name in what I consider an unnecessary revelation of information and adds that he's coming to dinner and we've been cooking all afternoon.

"It's beeping," she says, way too slowly. "What do I do? I don't remember what to do."

"Give me the phone," I shout and grab it, pressing *Flash* like crazy.

"Hi, honey, I'm at the airport," a voice says. It's my ex-husband. He thinks this is funny.

"Don't do this to me," I tell him. "I'm missing my call." I flash him off without a good-bye. Thank God, I think, when the voice on the other line is Aaron. He gives me the flight arrival time. I'm so grateful I've captured his voice, I don't stop to ask why he's waited so long to get in touch. He tells me not to park, just wait and he'll come to the car. I ignore this, figuring I'll get there early. To me, parking and waiting outside is not proper behavior for meeting your lover at the airport.

I SENSE something is wrong the minute I spot him dawdling down by the gate where I can't go. I love being picked up at airports. I love being greeted. I race off the plane and into anyone's waiting arms, no matter whose. But Aaron isn't running. He's thumbing through his briefcase for something; he's not trying to spot me. It's one of those pieces of information one registers at the time but refuses to acknowledge because the corner's been turned.

"Hi," I say, in my joyful reunion-at-the-airport voice. "How was your trip? I can't wait till we get home. Sophie's waiting. I have everything ready."

He puts his arm around me under duress, or maybe I put mine around him and he doesn't protest.

"What gives?" I want to say. But I don't. Instead I scrunch down. I giggle. I throw my hair back. I tell cute stories about my trials and tribulations of the day.

"Did you miss me?" I finally say as we get in the car. He doesn't seem remotely impressed that I found a parking place so near the terminal.

"I wouldn't say miss you," he answers in a chilly tone. "That wouldn't be honest. I *could* say I thought about you."

I wonder what happened to the I'm-so-into-you of yesterday. "In this case, lying might be a better alternative," I say, laughing to indicate what the mood is supposed to be. I am trying my best to charm him, using my most successful flirtation techniques. I am being mistreated, but it is the air I breathe, this denigration, and I feel my job is to warm it, like blowing warmth into cold hands.

"Tell me about the meeting," I say. My mother taught me always to ask people about themselves when at a loss for affection-winning conversation. I buckle my seatbelt, pulling the shoulder strap over my head and behind my back.

He stares at me. "What's wrong?" he says. "Why do you put the shoulder strap behind you like that?"

"Oh, that," I say, with a little giggle. "I always do that. Where the surgery was, it hurts me."

"It still hurts?"

"Well, actually it's been hurting a little more lately. It's probably nothing," I say, gaily. "Maybe a little touch of inflammatory breast cancer, is all."

"What's that?"

"Well, it's actually this sort of weird rapid-spread form of breast cancer. Not that that should faze me, but secondaries always move faster. Still, what's another fatal illness more or less?"

I glance over. Aaron isn't smiling. He doesn't seem to like my jokes.

"How *long* has this been going on?" he asks as I drive us the wrong way out of the parking lot.

"Oh, not long," I say. "Maybe six months."

I'm one of the few people who even know of the existence of inflammatory breast cancer. I know because Kaminetzky asked me to talk to a patient of his who was dying of it. I was flattered. I went to her room. She was sitting on the bed with her bright red hair cut in spikes around her head. "Do you like it"? she asked me "It's the chemo cut. I was in here before," she added, "ten years ago. I had lymphoma. He cured me with an experimental whole-body radiation treatment. It was the whole-body that caused this strange recurrence, I'm sure of it. But I had ten years I never would have had otherwise. I had a son. I've only got a few months now. Don't tell him I told you this," she said, meaning Kaminetzky. "I'm not going to go through the treatment. I want to spend time with my son." She waved at a portrait in a K-Mart gold frame. "I'm walking out of here tomorrow. I have tickets to hear Pavarotti sing with the Boston Symphony. We're going to a rehearsal. We're going to meet him. Do you want to come? I didn't come back to Boston just to sit in a damn hospital. I'm getting out. Look, I've lost weight," she said happily.

Later I went back to find Kaminetzky. He was in her room. The curtain was drawn around so I couldn't see her. The room was dark, and he was

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sitting on a chair outside the curtain with another doctor. I couldn't see the other doctor. I could only see him, leaning toward her, the light nylon of the curtain circling his knees. He looked more serious than I'd ever seen him, whispering to the doctor I couldn't see, then silent, his head bent forward, as if praying.

When he saw me, he rose and came into the hallway. I also whispered. "She says she's going to hear Pavarotti tomorrow."

"She's not going anywhere. We're doing a bone-marrow harvest tomorrow. I saved her ten years ago. I'm saving her now."

I never asked him what ever happened to her. I don't want to know.

We've just missed the turn for the Callahan Tunnel. I couldn't find a sign. There's a sign for Route 1 to Revere, but I don't want that. "I'm lost," I announce. "That's funny. It was so easy on the way in."

I turn around in a Shell station. The roads look deserted and unmarked in a way that only the roads in East Boston can look. I have no idea where we are.

"Don't you know where we are?" Aaron asks with irritation.

"Oh, I wouldn't go that far," I say. "Generally I know where we are. The specifics, though," I add, "the specifics are a little blurrier."

"Why don't you stop and ask someone?"

"I've lived in Boston longer than you," I tell Aaron. "It's a mistake to ask these people for directions. They're not like New Yorkers. They have no idea about their surroundings. But they'll always tell you something anyway, to be polite." Aaron has recently moved the headquarters of Hesed House from New York as part of his expansion campaign. In Hebrew, he's told me, *hesed* means kindness. It's one of the emanations of an infinite God.

The guy at the gas station tells us to go straight, then turn, then look for the sign. I'm convinced that he is just making the whole thing up. But the guy is actually right, I note with surprise, as the sign flies past us and I miss the turn again. Aaron has the look of one of those kids talked into riding the Cyclone who now wants off, and I realize this is the first of many turns I'm going to miss tonight.

I narrowly avoid hitting an oversize old Chevy dawdling in the left lane as I have to cut in to catch the turnoff for Route 1-A. It's not the tunnel, and it's not going to Brighton, but at least it's a highway.

"Why haven't you had this checked?" Aaron says.

I wonder if he's referring to my sense of direction. It would be consistent with his attitude toward my character defects.

"What?"

"This pain in your breasts."

"Oh, that."

"I don't understand why you won't see your doctor."

"I don't like to go to him that often. I try to avoid it. Every time I walk in there he proposes marriage. It gets oppressive, you know." I feel guilty, as if I'm bragging about my special status. I've already decided what I'll do if I have inflammatory breast cancer—just like the woman who wanted to hear Pavarotti, I'm refusing to have another drop of chemo dosed into me. But unlike her, I'm sticking to my decision.

"This has to stop. You have to do something about this relationship—this harassment from your doctor. It's interfering with your medical treatment, with your health."

I should be glad to have a boyfriend who cares about my going to the doctor. I don't know why I feel irritated instead.

"Oops," I say as we come out of the curve of a rotary. "That wasn't the right lane at all. Would you look at that! We're going to go right over the Tobin Bridge." I'm regretful. I made a last-minute decision, and the road was so dark, and of course there are no signs, or they are too small to see. The attitude about signs in Boston is, if you need a sign to get where you're going then you have no business going there.

I can't see at all in the dark. Maybe from the chemo I have a lack of beta carotene, but I don't want to explain this to Aaron. He hasn't been too sympathetic about the physical defects caused by my life-threatening illness. "You are the worst physical wreck of anyone I've ever dated. Is that your real hair color?" he asked recently in one of the moments that, when reported to my cousin Roni, caused his status to plunge even further. "You should make a list of remarks like that, so you don't forget them later," she advised.

"Maybe you should just take me home," he says, "since we're not that far from Somerville—or are we?"

I think of my fish stew sitting on the stove, the fresh baked bread, Sophie doing the last-minute touches, pulling out her drawing collection to show him. I hate nothing more than abandoning a plan.

"No, no, I'll find the way—you'll see," I say, loudly, my tone a bit too shrill.

"The thing I think you should do, is let me come with you to the doctor. Introduce me as your boy-

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friend, and we'll have a discussion with him about his behavior."

"Mmm, I'd rather not," I mumble. "But thank you for offering," I add.

"Why not?"

"Because it would hurt him, that's why not. He's never done anything that wasn't because he cared about me. Why should I want to hurt him this way?" My voice sounds more passionate than I intended.

Aaron is not happy with my answer. I can see this on his face when I glance over, but I can't look too long because I have to avoid the guys trying to sell coffee at the entrance to the bridge. I speed past them through the exact-change lane, tossing my coins and darting ahead just as the light turns green.

Aaron remains unmoved by my skill. "Are you sure this is the right way? I don't think this is right," he says.

"Of course it's right," I say with a great flourish as we head over the Mystic River and I point out the sights to him: the Bunker Hill monument, the ships in the bay, the old trainyards on the left, and ahead of us the Boston skyline, the Prudential tower, the Customs House clock. It's 9 p.m. If the clock is remotely correct—most of them are slow—we've been driving for at least an hour.

"If you don't want me to come with you, then I suggest you write him a letter," Aaron continues. "Make an appointment, then write him and tell him his inappropriate emotional and sexual pressures have inhibited you from seeking medical attention. When you go he will have received it."

"But what if I don't have time for the letter to get there before my appointment?"

"They must have a fax machine. Call and get the fax number."

We're over the bridge now on 93, which is euphemistically called a freeway. The traffic is beginning to back up, and I realize I've forgotten to get over into the right lane. Now I'll never be able to make the turn to get me back to Storrow Drive. I frantically check the rear-view mirror, but there are too many cars and I'm not good at cutting into traffic.

"Are you going to do it?" Aaron asks. "Do you agree to this?"

"OK," I say. "I'll do it." I have to make a quick decision or I'll be doomed as far as exits go. In a bold move, I decide to cut through Charlestown, planning to circle the industrial edge of Somerville and hoping Aaron won't recognize that we're anywhere near his house. I know there's a shortcut, but I can't remember the street names. "We were doing so well," I announce, "until I missed another turn. Don't worry, though. I know exactly where we are."

This should be easy. We're not that far from Fields, the publishing house where I work. But I can't seem to find my way coming from the other direction. "Do you still know where you are?" Aaron asks, with now-legitimate uneasiness. "Couldn't you make a U-turn and find Storrow Drive? Wouldn't that be better than going through the back of the warehouses?"

He's right, and I do, and finally we arrive at my little house on Bennett Street. Sophie opens the door to greet us, her voice high-pitched. "Mommy, what happened? I was so, *so* worried. What took you so long?"

"You shouldn't have been scared," I say, with a touch of anger. I don't want her to be panicked and whiny for this first meeting. I want her to be darling and charming and winning. I try to brush aside her fears. "We weren't that long."

"Mommy, it's late, late, late," she says. "Look at the clock."

I switch tactics. I'm conciliatory now. "Oh, honey, I'm so sorry you were worried. We got a little lost on the way home from the airport."

It's all my fault, I think. I shouldn't have gotten into the discussion about Kaminetzky. It's too emotional a topic. I should have talked about something else instead.

IN THE morning I call Kaminetzky's secretary, Anya, from work. She has her own views on why Kaminetzky allows my calls directly through. "He is very good to all his patients, but to him you are even more special," she said to me once. "I believe he thinks of you as one of his grown daughters."

This morning I chit and chat with her. I ask about her efforts at certification. She had medical training in Russia but has had difficulty transferring it to the U.S. I am good at this sort of thing.

"There is something wrong?" she interrupts, after we've gone on this way for a while. "Why it is you are calling?"

"I want to come see him. I need a check-up."

"This afternoon he is going away."

"Oh, well, then when he comes back," I say nonchalantly. I plan to tell myself and Aaron that at least I tried.

"But it is not until July 1st he returns. Why do you want this check-up?" she asks.

"I'm having pain," I say.

"Where?" she asks. Her tone abruptly shifts.

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"In both breasts."

"If you are having pain," she says, her voice professional, clipped, concerned, "then you must come to see him. He truly does not leave until late tonight, but I'm supposed to say this afternoon. Wait, I will talk to him."

I wait.

"He wishes for you to come in at two this afternoon" she says. "Only because it's *you*," she adds.

I remember after I hang up the phone that I was supposed to ask for the fax number. I consider calling back. I imagine her tone as she asks me why I need it. I envision her reading the fax before she carries it into Kaminetzky. I see her weighing the information in the fax against her admiration for how he treats me as his lost and lonely daughter. I picture her on my previous visit bringing him a tuna sandwich for lunch. I don't want her to read my faxed letter. Then I realize I don't want Kaminetzky to read it, either.

Tonight is Shavuos. It's a holiday I'd barely heard of before my foray into observant Judaism. On Shavuos we receive the Torah again. In Jewish tradition, I've learned, time is not linear. Time is the illusion we live under, but tonight it will have scudded away like the clouds, to reveal us still standing at Sinai as we stood centuries ago. We are to study all night, and when the sun rises we will hear the voice that has never stopped sounding, issuing the Ten Commandments. Tonight, it's like the first time.

Aaron wants me to pick up blintzes for the occasion. They have to be a special type, *holov Yisroel*, he tells me—some special type of milk. I try to ask him if it comes from Israel, but he has other calls, he tells me, trillions of them. "Don't ask me these questions," he says. "I hate making arrangements."

I call my friend Janice who grew up Orthodox and ask her what the hell is something-or-other Israel and where do you get it. It's a mark of special purity, she explains, and gives me a list of places she knew when she was a kid. "I don't know if they're still even around," she says, "but if that doesn't work, try calling up Congregation Shaarei Tefilah." The idea of calling up a synagogue for shopping tips seems odd to me, but because none of her childhood spots still exists, I have no choice. I'm grateful when the lady who answers the phone seems to regard this as a normal request. "Oh, sure, *holov Yisroel*," she says, correcting my distorted pronunciation. She even has a list of places. She patiently reads it off to me. She's so nice, I consider going there on my shul-hopping route.

I call the list: Handler's, Kupel's Bagels near the Israel Bookstore in Allston, a few others. I ignore the work piling on my desk, my e-mail, my other calls. I focus intently on this task, thinking if I pull this off, Aaron will finally be impressed. I take his "I hate making arrangements" as a battle cry. He's worried I might not have time to take care of him—that with my long underpaid hours at the publishing house, my daughter, and my life-threatening illness, I might not be able to devote myself to the needs of the struggle, to Hesed House, and to its leader, himself. I'll show him. I can do anything I set my mind to.

Handler's is open only until two, I learn, and I can't run all the way out to Newton on my lunch hour and get back to work in time. Friedman Brothers, though, closes an hour before sundown, and they say they have the blintzes. "Are they *holov Yisroel*?" I ask the guy who answers the phone. I think I have the pronunciation right. "Sure," he says. "Let me check. Of course." He hasn't even had time to look at the package. I'm convinced he's lying. They'll say anything to please you in this town.

But I write down the name and the address. Friedman Brothers. Friedman Brothers. The name sounds so familiar. Then I remember.

The Fabulous Friedman brothers, Kaminetzky always calls them. They consulted on my case. One brother is a pathologist and the other an oncologist, both at the Cleveland Clinic. You see their names on all the studies. Fabulous Friedman the pathologist pioneered the efficacy testing of bone-marrow transplants for metastatic cancer, which are must reading for anyone in the field these days.

Kaminetzky had called the Fabulous Friedman brothers the first night after I saw him. "I'll get back to you in a few days," he'd said. "I want to go over your records, have our own pathology department review your slides, and I want to talk to some people, see what they say." I was making the rounds. Everyone with a strange case does the same thing, I found out, carting around these little slides to all the joints on the East coast. After my surgery at Deaconess, I headed near my old home to the Bay State Medical Center, then down to New York City—Sloan-Kettering, Mount Sinai, Einstein, NYU. When I was finished with Manhattan and the Bronx, I returned to Boston: Beth Israel, Mass General, until I finally ended up with Kaminetzky at Mount Carmel. I'd had twelve opinions. I knew the pathology report by heart: papillary carcinoma with an unknown primary. It was the unknown primary that sent chills through me whenever I read the report. This jampacked little tumor had spread

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from somewhere, and no one knew from where. I had test after test. Maybe they would never find the primary, I was told. They would treat it with this or that. Just throw a lot of poisons down me and hope one would work. Or wait and watch.

"Wait and watch?" Kaminetzky had barked when I summed up all the other opinions to him on my first visit. "Wait and watch what? Wait and watch it metastasize? You want to find the primary, don't you? We're going to find it." He called me back that same night. "I've been talking to everyone in the country about you," he said. "The Friedman brothers at the Cleveland Clinic. I've talked to the Mayo Clinic. I've consulted with the boys at Memorial. . . ."

All of a sudden, thinking of the Fabulous Friedman brothers, I remember I haven't called Aaron to tell him of my appointment with Kaminetzky.

"Did you write the letter?" he immediately asks me.

"No," I tell him.

"Why not?" he says.

I mentally run through my repertoire of excuses. A car accident, my number-one favorite, probably isn't going to work this time. No fax machine? Forgot? Didn't have time? Couldn't use my arm because of the pain?

I take a deep breath. "I decided not to," I say slowly. "I decided against it."

"And why?" His voice has a high, strained pitch. He didn't expect this.

"A letter is a legal document. It's an accusation. Kaminetzky knows that. He's no dummy. I wouldn't write a letter like that if I wanted to continue going to him for treatment. I would only do it if I wanted to press charges." I swallow. "And I don't want to press charges."

"What are you going to do?" Now his voice is low, with a sad undertone.

"I'm going to talk to him in person. I'm going to deal with this face to face and have a talk with him."

"Do you want me to come with you? I'm willing to do it."

"No," I say, "I can handle it myself. But thanks," I add, and mean it, though I'm nagged by why he doesn't trust me to have this conversation on my own. Probably because I can't be trusted, I remind myself. Look at my track record. Haven't I used my sexuality to win favors and attention from my doctor? And given half a chance, wouldn't I do it again?

"Really," I repeat, "I can handle it."

"Do you want me to get the blintzes first?" I say, resorting to my eager-to-please voice. "Maybe I should skip the appointment altogether and get the blintzes?"

"No," he says. "Get the blintzes after. Call me as soon as you get out of the appointment. Call me from the hospital."

See, I think. See how he cares about my health.

KAMINETZKY MAKES a few of the usual jokes I've never minded when he examines me, but I don't laugh. Today I'm deadly serious. He picks up my cue. I notice he touches my breasts gently and without a hint of sexuality, but then, I recall, he has never been otherwise in the exams.

He asks me questions about my symptoms, leading me to see his line of thinking as he does in his usual way, so I feel I've come to the same diagnosis as his. "Both breasts are sore. That's good, you see. Have you been spotting? Any uterine pressure?"

"I think," he concludes, just as I see what he's getting at, "that this is your hormones kicking in. I predict in a month or two you'll have a normal period."

Now Aaron and I can have a baby. He'll be elated. We've already started talking about it.

"So it's not inflammatory breast cancer, then?"

He shakes his head, smiles slightly, as if pleased with my memory for bizarre diagnoses.

"If it were, I wouldn't go for chemo, you know," I say.

"Don't ever say that," he answers sharply.

"I want to talk to you about something," I say, in the most serious voice I've ever used with him. I wait, letting the change of tone settle in around us.

"I would have come in sooner, but I haven't, because of what was between us." I pause. "The emotions," I add, turning my palms up slowly as if to mark what I mean.

"I want you to come in," he evenly replies. He doesn't say, in response to my implied accusation, "Yes, I'm sorry," or "No, I have no idea what you're talking about."

He is looking directly at me. "Would you like to change doctors? Would you like to be followed somewhere else?"

"No," I say, nearly in tears. "I don't want anyone else. That's why I'm telling you this. You're the best doctor."

"I know you think that," he says softly.

"You saved my life." My voice rises in pitch.

Again he neither agrees nor denies. "I know that's how you feel," he says, every word measured.

He turns his head away slightly. "Then I'll be your doctor. That's just what I will be."

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"Thank you," I say, precisely.

"But you have to come in. You have to be checked when you have problems. That's all that counts, do you understand that?" His voice is intense now, passionate.

He repeats more quietly, "You have to come in. Any pain at all, I want you to call me—in a week or a day—I don't care. I want you to feel you can call me." He reaches out his hand as if to take mine, but leaves it outstretched instead. "I want you to feel you can come in."

He does love me, I think suddenly.

We stand up, and there is no hug good-bye in which he might linger, no parting joke. He only looks at me. "Thank you for coming in to see me," he says, his voice exuding pure honesty. "I am really glad you came in. Thank you for coming in." I feel like weeping.

He walks away down the corridor, and I can sense each step on the linoleum, this man who has just spoken to me with such kindness, this man who really loves me. I want to chase after him. What have I done?

I call Aaron from the pay phone in the corridor.

"What happened?" he wants to know. His voice is ready to spring.

"I told him how I felt. He responded very well. Aaron, I'm going to get my period soon, Kaminetzky says. Isn't that something?" I say breathlessly.

"Tell me what you said," Aaron asks me. "What exact words did you use?"

From the corner of my eye I see Kaminetzky leaning in to the pharmacy desk in the hall, talking to the pharmacist, and then he sees me, too, and waves. I watch him leave the floor, step into the elevator, and disappear. Then I turn back to continue my conversation with Aaron. I have to think of some way to reassure him, and then I have to leave in time to pick up the blintzes before Friedman Brothers closes, before the streaks in the sky mark the sunset and the beginning of this night of revelation.

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Mumbling Monuments

Michael J. Lewis

For the building of great and lasting monuments, wealth alone is insufficient; nor is it even necessary. Even the wealthiest societies, if they are missing the intangible quality of cultural confidence, will not build symbols for the distant future. Egyptian pyramids, Roman triumphal arches, medieval cathedrals were not the products of insecure civilizations. In stone one builds exclamation points, not question marks.

All the more remarkable, then, that the United States, less convinced of its inherent goodness and worth than ever before, should have recently embarked on the most spirited monument-building campaign in nearly a hundred years. Three ambitious monuments have been designed for the Mall in Washington, D.C.: the Franklin D. Roosevelt and Korean War Memorials, both now completed, and a controversial World War II Memorial on which construction is to begin in the spring. Taken as a whole, and together with the Vietnam Memorial (1981-82), these commemorative structures form a sweeping summary of the national experience in the 20th century. But are they a sign of reviving cultural confidence or, rather, a sign of change in the sorts of things we are confident about?

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Ask an American to describe a traditional civic monument and chances are he will draw a white marble temple with classical columns and carved capitals, hoisted on a podium and containing a solemn statue within. This is the architecture of neoclassicism, which, as traditions go, is not so old. In fact, it is scarcely older than the Constitution itself, a document that sprang from the same source of Enlightenment idealism and respect for Greek and Roman antiquity. As a visual style, neoclassicism flourished in the United States from the 18th until the early 20th century, a span that neatly coincides with the laying out and building of the city of Washington itself. Fittingly, that city's array of domes, temples, and obelisks forms the greatest ensemble of neoclassical monuments in the world.

In his 1791 plan for the capital, Pierre Charles L'Enfant envisioned the Mall as its principal public space, a two-mile-long Roman forum to be enriched over time with sculpture and monuments. In the loftiest classical terms, he conceived two intersecting axes, each of them anchored in a major public building, with the east-west axis beginning at the Capitol and the shorter north-south axis at the White House.

Just as L'Enfant intended, the other ends of these expansive vistas were eventually marked by monuments: the Lincoln Memorial (1914-17) for the long axis and the Jefferson Memorial (1938-43) for the shorter one. At the intersection of the two axes rises the Washington Monument (1833-85),

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sufficiently heroic in scale to control the vast sweep of space. All three structures, although built by different generations, show the same simplified geometry and forceful visual clarity, bending the devices of Imperial Rome to the demands of popular democratic imagery.

Before this ensemble could be completed, however, the neoclassical tradition was already ailing. John Russell Pope's design for the Jefferson Memorial, the most recent addition, was met with fierce antagonism by modernist architects and critics. Their objections were both technical and symbolic: Frank Lloyd Wright condemned the use of stone in an age of steel and concrete, Eero Saarinen lambasted the idea of copying the Roman Pantheon. Although Pope's monument was built, the criticism accomplished its work. No unabashedly classical monument of any significance has been built since, in Washington or anywhere else in the country.

What Pope's critics wanted, they said, was a monumentality that was also modern: up-to-date in materials and expression, free of historical reference, frankly acknowledging the transformed nature of life in the 20th century. An age that had conquered the atom—so went the argument—could not be captured within tired conventions, nor must architecture be allowed to present itself in quotation marks. But whether any unqualified masterpieces emerged from this heady rhetoric is another question: the soaring arch in St. Louis (1961-65), designed by Eero Saarinen to symbolize the city's historic role as a gateway to the West, may have come the closest.

The truth is that the temperament of modernism was *anti*monumental. Modern architecture, in particular, rose on a doctrine of functionalism and structural honesty, and its idealism was subsumed in crusades for tangible goals like mass housing and urban renewal. When it looked upon society, it tended to see ills that needed to be remedied more than achievements that cried out to be commemorated.

For this reason, the winning of World War II, the biggest national undertaking since the Civil War (and one which, in contrast to that earlier conflict, enjoyed an unprecedented degree of national consensus) was marked by no great national building. This is not to say that public monuments vanished entirely, for this period did witness a burgeoning of statuary and the like in municipal plazas, largely in response to local ordinances requiring that one percent of a civic building's cost be spent on a work of public art. But these were invariably the work of sculptors, not architects, and the results were hardly monumental: indeed, they were as far from heroic neoclassicism as can be imagined. Apart from the oversized Pop objects done by Claes Oldenburg, most fell into the turd-on-a-stick category.

IF MODERNISM had discredited the form of the traditional monument, the Vietnam war helped discredit the content. The war confirmed for many that there was little about America—or "Amerika"—that was worth celebrating. To every imaginable claim of virtue, a seemingly irrefutable qualifier could be raised. Yes, we had liberty—but we had also had slavery. Yes, we had equality—but we had also had Jim Crow. And yes, there was Normandy and the liberation of Europe—but there had also been Hiroshima. The increasing prevalence of this habit of mind—by now, several generations have been brought up to think this way instinctively—made the very idea of a celebratory national consensus seem laughable, let alone the idea of building monuments to express it.

It is therefore profoundly ironic that the Vietnam war should have helped rehabilitate the idea of the national monument—or, more accurately, the national memorial. But so it happened. In 1979, a privately funded initiative was established for such a memorial on the Mall, and two years later it sponsored an architectural competition, open to all American citizens. The brief for the competition was laconic, requiring only that the structure list the names of the 58,000 dead and missing American soldiers, be "reflective and contemplative in character," and contain no explicit political content. As is well known, the competition was won by Maya Lin, then a twenty-one-year-old architecture student at Yale.

Lin's design was a minimalist essay of stupendous restraint. It called for nothing more than a V-shaped retaining wall, partially submerged into the earth, its arms splayed at a 125-degree angle to point to the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial. This gesture bound it to the axial geometry of the Mall, but in every other respect it departed from the Mall's neoclassical language. Rather than a heroic volume, it encased a void; rather than white marble, it was constructed of polished black granite; rather than making a comforting reference to the continuity of Western art and culture, its form was altogether unfamiliar, resembling, if anything, the earth barrows and mounds of prehistoric architecture. Its diminishing arms, disappearing at last into the ground at either end, struck an ineffably tragic note. This was the war itself, overwhelming and incomprehensible.

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These qualities, indeed, were precisely what unleashed a fury among veterans' groups when Lin's design was unveiled. To assuage them, a piece of traditional sculpture was hastily added over Lin's strenuous protests. This was a vignette of three weary G.I.'s slogging their way home from patrol. Designed by the late Frederick Hart, an artist of talent, the group displayed a theatrical realism that could not have been more alien to Lin's abstract minimalism. Placed far enough away from the memorial so as not to detract from it, the statues often serve as a rallying point for veterans fortifying themselves before their cathartic encounter with the wall.

But the wall itself, to the surprise of nearly everyone, was an instant success, its lapidary dignity sweeping away all objections. The mirrored granite surface, permitting the visitor's reflection to shimmer over the incised roster of the dead, had a force that no architectural rendering or model could have predicted. It also turned out to have been a stroke of genuine inspiration to arrange the names in order of their death rather than alphabetically, thus establishing a sixteen-year timeline of the war, and also to begin and end the cycle at the interior angle of the V, thus making a kind of closed cycle of what would otherwise have been an uninflected line.

Lately, Lin herself has recounted the story of the memorial in a smartly presented portfolio of her various projects and her thoughts on them.* But anyone looking for a personal narrative will be disappointed. Writing in the crypto-guru voice of the architectural studio ("I imagined taking a knife and cutting into the earth"), Lin offers a mythic rather than journalistic account of the origin of her design. To be sure, minimalism does not lend itself to literary explication, but one has the feeling that an interesting story remains here untold.

As it happens, Lin's design was conceived in the course of an undergraduate seminar. Rather than emerging fully developed, as she implies, it was exposed during its intermediate and final presentations to the customary round of comments by visiting critics, and it changed considerably in the process. Or so I am told by one of these critics, the architect Carl Pucci, and by Lin's seminar professor, F. Andrus Burr. This is not to denigrate Lin's considerable achievement but merely to note that, like most artists, she is reluctant to shed light on rejected drafts. Nor is she any more informative about the tense aftermath of her victory, when it looked for a time as if the project might be derailed by opposition, glossing over the interlude as "a few weeks of tense and hostile negotiations."

From the point of view of her career, at any rate, one gathers that the Vietnam Memorial has been a tough act to follow. After graduating from Yale's school of architecture, Lin has enjoyed modest success as a designer of public monuments mining the same minimalist vein, like the Civil Rights Memorial in Atlanta. Still, if one is to be remembered as a one-hit wonder, it might as well be for the most popular monument in our nation's capital.

But Lin also achieved something else, which was to spark the unprecedented monument-building mood of the past decade.

THE VIETNAM Memorial offered several lessons, architectural and political. The motif of the retaining wall, for starters, instantly replaced the conventional design of granite-stela-and-bronze-plaque, and was swiftly replicated in countless local Vietnam memorials across the United States. Their ubiquity demonstrated the persistence of a deep and unstilled appetite for large civic gestures. But they also testified to a considerable degree of ambivalence concerning the war itself. Wherever these monuments have been proposed, they have been built without opposition and generally very quickly, unhappily rendered in cinderblock and cheap metal. Most will look shabby in short order.

In Washington, though, the consequences have been more dramatic. A logjam that had delayed the Roosevelt Memorial—authorized in 1959, designed in 1974—was broken at last; the site opened in 1997. Memorials for the Korean war and World War II were authorized by Congress in 1988 and 1993, respectively, and the former opened in 1995. The three differ in instructive ways.

First, the Korean War Memorial. With the scrupulous sense of fairness that has come to distinguish such proceedings, a site was chosen that precisely matched the Vietnam Memorial, balancing it across the reflecting pool at the western end of the Mall. The monument itself is the work of the sculptor Frank Gaylord, who clearly tried to achieve Maya Lin's goal with Frederick Hart's means. As with Hart's three Vietnam servicemen, Gaylord's subject is a platoon on patrol, in this case 19 bronze soldiers trudging heavily uphill, burdened by heavy ponchos that evoke the Korean winter. Visitors are meant to pass among them, gazing into their impassive faces and sharing empathetically in their experience.

The notion of a sculptural group through which the visitor moves is hardly novel; perhaps the most

* *Boundaries*. Simon & Schuster, 224 pp., $40.00.

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famous example is Rodin's celebrated *Burghers of Calais* (1886). Unfortunately the comparison is not flattering to Gaylord's tableau, whose theatrical and cloying effect is further diminished by the mirrored surface toward which the soldiers appear to move. This is the Wall of Faces, upon which are etched the countenances of military personnel and behind-the-lines support troops, taken from wartime photographs. But the nineteen bronze soldiers are also reflected in the wall, creating an unpleasant visual clutter in which photographs are turned into flat sculpture and plastic sculptures are turned into shining images. If Lin's mute wall invites rumination, this one suggests flickering screens of another kind entirely.

Image overload also spoils the Roosevelt Memorial, which makes the Korean War Memorial seem as terse as a haiku by contrast. Designed by Lawrence Halprin, a landscape architect, in collaboration with a group of sculptors, the rambling structure is as much landscape as it is a building. A sequence of four outdoor rooms represents Roosevelt's four terms, each lavishly documented by freestanding statues, relief sculpture, and carved inscriptions. Even FDR's dog, Fala, is pantingly immortalized in bronze.

Some of the individual works are not bad in themselves. In George Segal's *Fireside Chat*, for example, a lanky man leans forward on a chair as he listens intently to one of Roosevelt's radio addresses; this is the sort of expressive pose that is Segal's strength (otherwise, his figures tend in general to be faceless ciphers). But cumulatively the barrage of imagery at different scales and in different genres is disorienting. As with the Korean War Memorial, the visual sources here are photographic, and they are made lesser by being translated into bronze. Where traditional memorials monumentalize their subjects by suppressing the incidental detail in order to achieve an abstracted essence, here the tone is furiously anecdotal, as in book illustration. It may be that the intended effect was of a series of devotional chapels, but the result is closer to Madame Tussaud's wax museum.

The FDR monument is also scrupulous in its political correctness. Advocacy groups for the handicapped had protested the fact that, although a polio victim, he would be depicted without a clearly visible wheelchair; that FDR himself had assiduously suppressed images of his incapacitation in his lifetime evidently counted for nothing. (Yielding to the threat of demonstrations that might mar the monument's dedication, President Clinton duly announced that a wheelchair-bound Roosevelt would be added to the site.) At the same time, antismoking groups succeeded in eliminating Roosevelt's one visual trademark: the cigarette holder perpetually clenched in his teeth, emphasizing the outthrust jaw that contributed so much to the impression of jaunty optimism. Thus was completed the transformation of a vigorous and rakish cavalier into a differently-abled and rather prim nonsmoker. Finally, in deference to animal-rights groups, also suppressed was a trademark of *Eleanor* Roosevelt: namely, her fox stole.

All this fussing with cigarette holders and furs suggests that the visual language of allegory is in a sorry state. (Nor is the fundamental dishonesty restricted to the incidentals of imagery; in an excessively wordy memorial, no room was found for one of Roosevelt's most famous statements: "December 7, 1941—a date that will live in infamy.") It may be that, for complicated reasons, a visual culture like ours is ill at ease with what the proper reading of allegory requires, which is at bottom a literary imagination. But whatever the cause, the inability to think allegorically helps explain why Frederick Hart was not allowed to portray the American military experience in Vietnam by means of a single American soldier but had to depict three men of three distinct races—and why a women's memorial was added shortly thereafter. The fear of leaving someone or something out is hostile to the allegorical impulse, which seeks not to itemize but to generalize, and to speak not specific truths but great truths. Without allegory, however, it is difficult to make a memorial truly monumental.

In some cases, it must be said, no allegory at all would have been preferable to the simplistic and hackneyed symbolism with which we are confronted. Worst in this respect is the Korean War Memorial, which was originally intended to depict not nineteen but 38 soldiers—the reference being to the 38th parallel along which the war pivoted. This number being too unwieldy, it was arbitrarily halved, with the explanation that it would be doubled again by the reflecting mirror. Here is allegory utterly inverted: the use of important things—human beings—to represent an accidental feature of geography.

WHAT, THEN, of the World War II Memorial, the most traditional of the monuments and the only one with neoclassical aspirations? Perhaps expectedly, and perhaps also on account of its prominent location on the main axis of the Mall, this project has become deeply controversial. When it was first proposed in 1987, it was clear

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that a more important site was called for than the one chosen for the Vietnam Memorial. With a minimum of public consultation, a spot was designated at the east end of the reflecting pool, roughly midway between the Lincoln and Washington monuments. A competition was held in 1996, resulting in the selection of Friedrich St. Florian, an Austrian-born architect who teaches at the Rhode Island School of Design.

It is easy to see how St. Florian won. The architectural problem posed by the competition brief was to place a monument directly athwart a processional path in such a way as not to interrupt that path either visually or spatially. For such a problem, history offers a number of prototypical solutions; the most important is Bernini's vast colonnade before St. Peter's in Rome, which serves as a plaza without blocking the processional axis and which permits gathering as well as passage. St. Florian's solution was similar. Instead of interrupting the open space of the Mall, he extended that space to the north and south by means of semicircular colonnades. All the architectural elements are pushed to either side of the sight line, leaving nothing on axis but three stepped terraces and a fountain.

St. Florian turned this bifurcated site to advantage, using each semicircle to represent one of the war's two major theaters. Each consists of an arc of granite stelae, seventeen feet in height, with each stela bearing a bronze wreath alternately depicting oak (strength) and wheat (abundance). There are 56 stelae in all, representing the number of American states and territories that participated in the fighting, and the focus of each semicircle is a square baldachin consisting of four arches and four bronze eagles carrying a laurel wreath.

St. Florian's architecture seeks to restore Washington's classical tradition at the moment before it flickered out in the 1930's. His details are derived from the severe stripped classicism of Paul Cret, the French émigré who built America's finest federal architecture in the 1920's and 1930's. To judge from the published renderings, St. Florian's design shows a commendable seriousness about the use of stone, and there is none of the two-dimensional cut-out quality of the postmodern classicism of recent decades. But it is not Bernini, either. A certain schematic blockiness afflicts the architectural elements, which do not have the plastic richness that comes from long experience in the sculptural treatment of stone; nor could that be expected in a late-blooming classicist like St. Florian whose previous experience has been in architectural modernism.

BUT IT is not for its architecture that this monument has been the subject of a national controversy. Rather, the National Coalition to Save Our Mall, supported by editorials in the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal*, among others, is exercised over the *site*. It has brought a lawsuit seeking an injunction to halt the project before construction begins this spring.

The coalition is a cocktail of convenience of the Right and the Left. As it happens, there is a strong case to be made for leaving the Mall as it is, and a certain reticence about hasty monument-making is also fully justified in light of such less than satisfying works as the Korean War Memorial. But most of the voices raised against the World War II Memorial are not of this conservative ilk. Rather, they are hostile to the very notion of celebrating on the Mall the kind of idealized nationalist sentiment that the monument seems to imply. This is reflected in the scurrilous comparisons of St. Florian's design to the Nazi architecture of Albert Speer. (As it happens, Speer himself plagiarized heavily from Paul Cret's classicism, which was widely studied in Germany during the 1930's.)

While the results of the lawsuit have yet to be determined, and the fate of the World War II Memorial thus remains undecided, what is clear is that the recent consensus in favor of national monuments and memorials is an exceedingly fragile one. The Left remains opposed to works that evoke traditional American attitudes, and the Right to avant-garde experimentation. In this standoff, both factions have been able to support monuments honoring Americans who can somehow be depicted as the *victims* of war; but victimhood is a slim basis on which to rebuild a monumental tradition. The dispute over the right to construct a World War II Memorial on the Mall is akin to the dispute over the facts that belong in our textbooks. And at heart that is not an architectural problem at all.

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OBSERVATIONS

At Play with Susan Sontag

Carol Iannone

DESPITE EVERYTHING she has written and done since the 1960's, Susan Sontag seems fatefully identified with the part she played in that era and its immediate aftermath. As a literary intellectual and a kind of high priestess of cultural revolution, she was, indeed, crucially instrumental in advancing many of the trends that took hold in those years and that persist to this day: the erasure of the distinction between high and popular art, the promotion of an avant-garde sensibility as a form of transgression against the bourgeois order, the pulling-down of critical hierarchies and standards of judgment, the knee-jerk identification with political "liberation" and its avatars.

But at several points later in her career, Sontag also, startlingly, reversed herself. Perhaps the most famous such reversal occurred in 1982, when she more or less repudiated her previous espousal of third-world Communist regimes. More recently, in a television interview, she declared that her two latest novels, *The Volcano Lover* (1992) and *In America*,* the latter of which won last year's National Book Award for fiction, mark a shift away from her former views concerning the function of art and the place of the artist. These turnarounds, and others, say a great deal not only about Sontag but about the sensibility she was influential in creating.

ACCORDING TO Carl Rollyson and Lisa Paddock, authors of a gossipy, informative, occasionally over-earnest new biography,† Susan Sontag was born Susan Rosenblatt in New York City in 1933 and raised in Arizona and California. Her father died in 1938; seven years later, her mother married Captain Nathan Sontag, a war hero, who gave his name to Susan and her sister.

Her early life was marked by precocity. She skipped grades, entered college at Berkeley at sixteen, and wound up at Robert Hutchins's tradition-minded University of Chicago, where she eagerly embraced the rigorous humanities curriculum. At age seventeen she married one of her professors, the sociologist Philip Rieff, and they had a son, now the writer David Rieff.

The couple were soon living apart, although they would not divorce for several years. After earning a master's degree from Harvard, Sontag left her child in the care of his father's relatives and spent some time in Europe, studying at Oxford and the Sorbonne, soaking up post-war cultural trends, and familiarizing herself with European intellectual figures. Returning home, she claimed custody of her son and embarked upon a career. Aside from brief stints teaching and working at COMMENTARY, she devoted her time to writing. She tried her hand at playwriting, filmmaking, and fiction—in addition to the two recent novels, there were *The Benefactor* (1963) and *Death Kit* (1967), plus a collection of short stories, *I, etcetera* (1978). But it is as an essayist that she made her greatest mark, and did her greatest damage.

Several of the pieces in Sontag's first collection, *Against Interpretation* (1966), first appeared in small-

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* Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 387 pp., $26.00.

† *Susan Sontag: The Making of an Icon.* Norton, 369 pp., $29.95.

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circulation journals like *Partisan Review* or in the *New York Review of Books*. Written in a generalizing, oracular style ("far-fetched, pretentious, and esoteric," sniffed Edmund Wilson), they posed a deliberate challenge to normative cultural and critical ideals. Objecting, for example, to the "genteel-moralistic judgment in contemporary literary and film criticism," Sontag repudiated the focus on content in art, stressing instead the supremacy of formal and aesthetic considerations and calling for an "enlivening of sensibility and consciousness." Elsewhere, she advanced the ironic, parodic antiseriousness of "camp" aesthetics as a "solvent of morality"; endorsed the "liberating, antisymbolic" quality she had discovered in popular culture; and promoted the "sensuous immediacy" to be experienced in avant-garde films like Alain Resnais's *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961) and in the stripped-down fiction of the French novelist Alain Robbe-Grillet, who wrote the screenplay for that film as well as the book on which it was based (a sensuous immediacy that, be it said, had eluded many of the stupefied consumers of these works).

Anticipating by many years the blinkered aestheticism that would fuel the controversy over the public funding of works like the photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe, Sontag explicitly uncoupled both art and criticism from their residual moral moorings. "We need not an hermeneutics, but an erotics of art," she declared. In "On Style," she insisted that the works of the Nazi filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl transcended, by virtue of their "grace" and "sensuousness," the noxious propaganda they disseminated. Similarly, for Sontag, Norman Mailer's 1965 novel, *An American Dream*, in which the murder of a domineering wife is depicted as an act of liberation, taught the need to suspend ordinary judgments when confronting a superior work of art. In "The Pornographic Imagination" (1967, reprinted two years later in her second collection, *Styles of Radical Will*), she found in the degradation and mandarin cruelty of *The Story of O*, by the pseudonymous Pauline Réage, a form of aesthetic and even religious ecstasy.

BUT THEN came the first of her reversals. In the early 70's, thanks largely to the feminist movement, Leni Riefenstahl began to be lionized as a major filmmaker, and Sontag suddenly found herself offended. In an essay entitled "Fascinating Fascism" (1974), she turned on a dime, condemning Riefenstahl for her exaltation of Nazi ideals and stamping a swastika on everything she had tried to create even after the Third Reich was long gone. Almost moralistically, one might say, Sontag went so far as to locate a "fascist aesthetics" similar to Riefenstahl's in the glorification of sadomasochism that she saw in the rising homosexual subculture of the 1970's.

Despite the conspicuous failure to acknowledge her own reversal, and despite some over-the-top observations (Sontag found fascist qualities even in the Hollywood choreography of Busby Berkeley), "Fascinating Fascism" was a welcome piece of work. By re-establishing the continuum between art and morality, it not only restored a certain sense of integrity to the act of criticism but affirmed the importance of intellectual honesty in the face of belligerent trends like contemporary feminism, with its insistence on judging works of art by their "correctness" on the issue of women as an "oppressed" group. Altogether, the essay *seemed* to mark a genuine change in sensibility.

But it did not, and it had no follow-up. Sontag went back to writing her often aimless pieces on gloomy avant-garde European writers and filmmakers, and to cultivating her image as a proponent of the cutting edge. (According to Rollyson and Paddock, she and her publisher also worked assiduously to forge her raven-haired good looks and esoteric European proclivities into an alluring persona, an activity that seems to have claimed almost as much of her attention as working out the implications of her ideas.) As for the Riefenstahl turnaround, the only explanation she gave an interviewer in 1975 was that both her earlier view and her revised view "illustrate the richness of the form-content distinction, as long as one is careful always to use it against itself"—a pronouncement that explained nothing while creating the impression that Sontag was beyond the kind of obvious contradiction in which her interviewer wanted to catch her.

Her next dramatic reversal occurred over the issue of Communism. In the 60's and 70's she had written warmly of the Communist regimes of Cuba and North Vietnam, contrasting them to the utter awfulness of the United States. But then she began to befriend Eastern European dissidents, particularly the exiled Russian poet Joseph Brodsky, and from them she learned something that until then, and in spite of her deep reading and broad erudition, had evidently eluded her: Communism brought blight and terror, murder and brutality, wherever it was imposed. In 1982, she took the occasion of a gathering in New York City of leftwing writers in support of the Polish workers' movement, Solidarity, to announce her new revelation.

The scene is described in detail by Rollyson and Paddock. Sontag, they write, grew increasingly angered as speaker after speaker equated conditions in Poland with those in the United States. (It is a little hard to credit this response on the part of a woman who had written not so long before that "the quality of American life is an insult to the possibilities of human growth.") When her turn finally came to speak, she proclaimed that, on the issue of Communism, the Left, herself included, had been guilty of

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smugness, hypocrisy, even dishonesty. "We were," she said, "so sure who our enemies were (among them, the professional anti-Communists), so sure who were the virtuous and who the benighted. . . . We thought we loved justice; many of us did. But we did not love the truth enough."

The speech, muddled as it was, and accompanied as it was by ritual denunciations of the detestable Ronald Reagan, took courage. Like others before her, Sontag soon found that neither her sterling left-wing credentials nor her iconic status as an apostle of the avant-garde could save her from the burden of inevitable condemnation as a traitor to the cause. But she did not bear this burden for long—or, rather, she quickly put it down. Although she had promised to write a lengthy essay on the intellectual romance with Communism, it never appeared; what she told an interviewer several years later was that in the end she "was not interested in lending aid and comfort to the neoconservatives." This tawdry and dishonorable statement marked the end of her own belated acknowledgement of the horrors committed by the movement with which she had been so infatuated. So much for loving the truth.

STILL, ALTHOUGH she failed to deliver on her lengthy reconsideration of Communism, she was apparently not done with rethinking other issues. In 1988, she who had championed perversity, pornography, and the "erotics of art" was to be heard lamenting the "cultural nihilism" she saw all around her, and she who had done so much to erase the distinctions between high and low now pronounced herself troubled over the leveling of standards and the diminishment of the idea of a canon. Although these startling recognitions never emerged in the work she was doing at the time (lengthy essays on illness and photography, and a story about AIDS that has been selected by John Updike for *Best American Short Stories of the Century*), they would appear to have ripened over the past decade. Indeed, according to a recent article in the *New Yorker* by Joan Acocella, Sontag is now worried that she herself might be seen as partly responsible for our current state of cultural barbarism—worried enough, indeed, to have written an introduction to a forthcoming new edition of *Against Interpretation* in which she intends to stipulate the following:

> To call for an "erotics of art" did not mean to disparage the role of the critical intellect. To laud work condescended to, then, as "popular culture" did not mean to conspire in the repudiation of high culture and its burden of seriousness, of depth. When I denounced . . . certain kinds of facile moralism, it was in the name of a more alert, less complacent seriousness. What I didn't understand . . . was that seriousness itself was in the early stages of losing credibility in the culture at large. . . . Now the very idea of the serious (and of the honorable) seems quaint, "unrealistic," to most people.

For good measure, Sontag told Acocella that she did not even *like* some of the experimental antirealistic writers, such as Alain Robbe-Grillet and Nathalie Sarraute, that she had promoted as harbingers of a new fiction.

Like them or not, however, she had certainly taken them as models for her own early fiction. This tended to be airless, elliptical, quasi-Kafkaesque, centered on the subjectivity of consciousness. In her latest two novels, however, whose dates of publication more or less track the progress of her newly formed respect for moral "seriousness," Sontag has discovered that she also likes such antique literary qualities as narrative, plot, characters, objects, clothes, historical detail, and the presence of a visible world. Thus, *The Volcano Lover*, set in late-18th-century Naples and based on the love triangle involving Admiral Nelson, Emma Hamilton, and her husband William, is full of sensuous period detail, intricate descriptions, and imaginative re-creations.

Which is not to say it succeeds in being a good novel. The main character, based on William Hamilton, is a collector of beautiful objects, and his cold possessive distance creeps into the narrative voice. Even the sex scenes between the figures based on Nelson and Emma seem gelid, as if the participants were under glass. And despite all the drapery and dressing, the focus remains on Sontag and her ideas, which turn out to be more ordinarily romantic than luminously enlightened, more Danielle Steele, so to speak, than Simone Weil (the subject of one of her earlier essays in transcendence).

Her new work, *In America*, is somewhat less affected. It, too, is based on a real-life figure from the past. Maryana Zalezowska is a fictionalized Helena Modjeska, the famous Polish actress who, inspired by American utopians like Robert Owen, came here in the late 19th century with an entourage of family and friends to build a commune in California. As in life, so in the novel, when the experiment fails, Maryana returns to the stage and leaps from triumph to triumph, an adored, applauded, and pampered diva.

Parts of this novel are indubitably compelling, especially the concentrated distillation of period detail and the intricate evocations of the craft of acting. But once again Sontag intrudes constantly, the still unfinished work of the essayist usurping that of the novelist. Nor is it difficult to see in Maryana a portrait of Sontag herself, another celebrated diva and even a homegrown species of European expatriate, now largely retired from her utopian endeavors but still seeking metamorphosis in art.

CAMILLE PAGLIA once wrote that Sontag never seemed part of Amer-

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ica. If that is so, in her new novel she, like her main character, more or less makes her peace with the country, at least in the sense that, as a place, it permits one to shed past selves and become whatever one wants to be. America, for Sontag, is no longer the oppressor of humanity, a straitjacket of conformity, but rather a land of limitless opportunity and an ongoing experiment in human possibility.

This vision of America as, essentially, a work in progress is itself rather common on the Clintonite and post-Clintonite Left nowadays. Although a welcome change from the radical animosity that characterized the attitude of yesterday's Left, it betrays (as Wilfred McClay has pointed out) the same adolescent refusal to accept responsibility for things as they are or for one's part in them. "Adolescent," indeed, remains perhaps the best word for the brilliant, ultrasophisticated Sontag herself. Here she is again in the *New Yorker* on her disenchantment with the culture she helped to create:

> It never occurred to me that all the stuff I had cherished, and all the people I had cared about in my university education, could be dethroned. All that would happen is that you would set up an annex—you know, a *playhouse*—in which you could study these naughty new people, who challenged things. And you could have it all! Little did I know that the avant-garde transgressiveness of the 60's was to become absolutely institutionalized and that most of the gods of high culture would be dethroned and mocked. [Emphasis added]

She enjoyed breaking down walls, in other words, but only if someone else kept the house intact. She enjoyed wielding critical license, but was appalled by the spectacle of others wielding it. Like the careless Russian radicals in Turgenev and Dostoevsky, she took civilization as a given, like the air we breathe, unthreatened by encroaching barbarism, never in need of care, cultivation, or protection.

So it turns out that, far from knowing more about art, literature, and life than everybody else, she was more ignorant; and far from having her finger on the pulse of coming things, she was oblivious to their unfolding, less a keen-eyed prophet than a neurasthenic naif, living off the accumulated cultural capital of the centuries. To judge by her new novel, and even more by her breathy pronouncements on the vanished world she would like to have back and that she did so much to destroy, she is still in the playhouse, with no intention of coming out.

MUSIC

Jazz & Its Explainers

Terry Teachout

SO FAR as is known, the word "jazz" first appeared in print in 1913. Since then, a vast literature has sprung up, ranging from children's biographies of jazz greats to critical studies of forbiddingly high intellectual density—a development befitting the century-long emergence and maturing of what may well prove to be America's most significant contribution to the modern movement in art. Indeed, the most recent addition to the bookshelf, *Jazz: A History of America's Music*, a lavishly illustrated coffee-table book by Ken Burns and Geoffrey C. Ward, published in conjunction with the airing by PBS of a ten-part television series, has been treated by the mass media as a major cultural event.[1]

Unfortunately, there is far less to this literature than meets the eye. Though a few books can safely be ranked with the best that has been written about any of the other arts, most jazz criticism is second-rate or worse, while the average jazz bi-

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[1] Knopf, 489 pp., $65.00.

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ography is sketchy, inadequately sourced, and factually unreliable. As for jazz journalism, it is for the most part held in well-deserved contempt by working musicians, who rightly dismiss it as personality-oriented, agenda-driven, and often blatantly ignorant of basic musical facts.

The publication of *Jazz*, together with the near-simultaneous appearance of other important books on the subject, serves to illustrate the extent of the problem, and what if anything might be done about it.

Until fairly recently, most writing about jazz has been the product of what one might call an "amateur" tradition, which is to say that it has been penned by enthusiasts with no musical training.

The reasons for this are not hard to understand. For a long time, jazz was regarded not as an art music but as a commodity, a functional accompaniment to dancing and other social activities; journalists who covered the music in its early years tended to treat it accordingly. As for musicians themselves, many were poorly educated, and though they were often capable of discussing their art with illuminating clarity and specificity (as can be heard in the oral-history interviews conducted with artists like Jelly Roll Morton), few felt comfortable writing about it, save through the problematic medium of the "ghostwritten" autobiography.[2]

The resulting vacuum was filled by fans of the new form, whose approach to it varied widely. Many early jazz writers—Rudi Blesh, John Hammond, Hugues Panassié, and others—were bellicose partisans of particular artists or styles. Others, like Leonard Feather, doubled as paid publicists. A surprisingly large number—Hammond, Otis Ferguson, Charles Edward Smith—were political leftists whose initial interest in jazz may have been partly motivated by the assiduous attention then being paid by the American Communist party to black "folk music."

But with only a few exceptions, these writers had two things in common: they possessed little or no technical knowledge, and they did not know how to play jazz on any musical instrument. And so, not surprisingly, the bulk of early jazz journalism consisted either of uncritical cheerleading, romanticized reportage bordering on mythmaking, or exercises in gratuitous abuse—like Hammond's description of Duke Ellington's music as "vapid and without the slightest semblance of guts," or Panassié's claim that bebop musicians "have the intolerable presumption to present themselves as jazzmen." By the same token, most "historical" writing about jazz published during the music's first half-century was factually unreliable and overripe in tone.

This is not to say that the amateur tradition failed to produce *any* writing of lasting significance. Ferguson, for instance, was a perceptive reporter and vivid stylist whose journalism remains readable to this day. Similarly, the lively writings of George T. Simon have retained their value as a contemporary chronicle of big-band jazz in the 30's and 40's, while the idiosyncratic jazz criticism of the Englishman Philip Larkin is a uniquely illuminating document of the effects of jazz on the imagination of a great poet.[3]

In many ways, Whitney Balliett, the jazz critic of the *New Yorker*, whose critical work has now been brought together in *Collected Works: A Journal of Jazz, 1954-2000*, exemplifies the amateur tradition at its best.[4] A graceful, poetic stylist, Balliett displays a catholicity of taste unusual for a jazz critic of his generation. As an avocational drummer with no musical training, Balliett eschews all but the most elementary of technical terms, seeking instead to paint what might be called "word portraits" of jazz. "Guided by Edmund Wilson's precept that a critic must first describe what he is going to criticize," he explains, "I began trying to describe what jazz sounded like. Music is transparent and bodiless and evanescent, so I was forced to use metaphor and simile and other such circumambulatory devices."

Some of Balliett's purpler passages do indeed have a roundabout quality that might have been alleviated were he more conversant with the formal language of music. On the other hand, his determination to write in plain (if not simple) English has led him to coin some of the most evocative images to have found their way into jazz criticism. Here is a typical Balliett description, this one of the virtuoso drummer Buddy Rich:

> He could move between his tom-toms and his snare drum and his cymbals with such speed that he gave the impression he was playing simultaneously on three different parts of his set. His long solos were not rhythmic investigations as much as avalanches—he wanted to bury his listeners with his brilliance, with crushing rolls and rimshots, with round-the-set rocketry and bass-drum thunder.

While musicians have mixed feelings about Balliett's criticism, they are all but unanimous in praising the merits of his *New Yorker* "profiles," collected in *American Musicians* (1986, rev. 1996), in which the styles and personalities of leading jazz performers are sensitively portrayed. Many of these pieces, whose subjects are allowed to speak at length and in their own words (skillfully edited by Balliett), have been widely cited as

[2] A rare exception was Louis Armstrong, one of the very few major jazz musicians to have produced a self-written memoir, *Satchmo: My Life in New Orleans* (1954). A recent collection of letters, occasional articles, and other pieces, *Louis Armstrong in His Own Words: Selected Writings* (Oxford, 255 pp., $25.00), offers further evidence of Armstrong's untutored but unquestionable flair as a writer of prose.

[3] Representative essays by all three men, and of most of the other authors mentioned in this article, are included in Robert Gottlieb's *Reading Jazz: A Gathering of Autobiography, Reportage, and Criticism from 1919 to Now* (1996).

[4] St. Martin's, 872 pp., $40.00.

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primary source material by biographers and scholars. Taken together, they will likely constitute Balliett's chief long-term claim to recognition.

THE WORK of a writer like Whitney Balliett notwithstanding, truly enlightened amateurs remain hard to find among the ranks of jazz journalists. Yet the development of a competing "professional" tradition—one dominated by writers with musical training and performing experience—has been far slower. While a handful of early writers had classical training and were capable of analyzing the music they heard, it was not until the 50's that a new generation began to publish regularly. Such musician-critics as Max Harrison and André Hodeir brought an unprecedented level of analytic rigor to the discussion of jazz, while Benny Green's *The Reluctant Art: Five Studies in the Growth of Jazz* (1962, rev. 1991) was the first book by a working jazz musician directly comparable in literary quality to the finest writing of critics in other fields.

In 1968, Gunther Schuller published *Early Jazz: Its Roots and Musical Development*—the first full-length historical-analytic monograph to be written by a scholar with extensive performing experience. A classical horn player turned modernist composer, Schuller pioneered the development of "third-stream music," a style of composition that sought to integrate elements of jazz and classical music into a single unified style. His *Early Jazz*, despite various errors of fact and emphasis (a problem that would become more pronounced in a 1989 sequel, *The Swing Era*), was rightly viewed as a landmark in the development of fully professional jazz scholarship.

The next such landmark was *Bix: Man and Legend* (1974), a biography of the cornetist Bix Beiderbecke written by the trumpeter-journalist Richard M. Sudhalter in collaboration with Philip R. Evans and William Dean-Myatt. No previous book about a jazz musician had been so extensively documented, and none had been based exclusively on primary sources. Although few if any contemporary reviewers appreciated its significance, this was the first time the life story of a major jazz artist had been told in the kind of exhaustive detail that would be taken for granted in a scholarly biography of a major classical composer.

IF NOTHING else, the appearance of *Early Jazz* and *Bix: Man and Legend* served to underline the fundamental limitations of the amateur tradition. Even so, however, the law of supply and demand ensured that amateurs would continue to dominate, and in time a number of these amateurs even metamorphosed into "scholars." Thus, the late Martin Williams, whose good intentions were undercut by a severely limited technical knowledge of music, took charge of the Smithsonian Institution's jazz program, while Albert Murray, a literary academic with no musical training, published *Stomping the Blues* (1976), a work of pseudo-scholarship advancing the ahistorical but nonetheless influential thesis that the ability to play the blues was the defining trait of "authentic" jazz musicians. The pernicious implication of this thesis—that white musicians could not pretend to such authenticity—was taken up by Stanley Crouch, another hyperopinionated, musically uneducated jazz amateur who in turn passed it on to Wynton Marsalis; the programs presented by "Jazz at Lincoln Center," which is directed by Marsalis, reflect the racialist jazz ideology of Murray and Crouch writ large.[5]

Other amateurs have devoted themselves to producing more or less ambitious biographies. Although some of these, like Ross Firestone's *Swing, Swing, Swing: The Life and Times of Benny Goodman* (1993), are carefully researched and responsibly written, others, like Leslie Gourse's *Straight, No Chaser: The Life and Genius of Thelonious Monk* (1997), are amateurish in every sense of the word. Even the best of these writers are incapable of discussing the musical achievements of their subjects except in the most general terms.

Which brings us at last to Ken Burns and Geoffrey Ward's *Jazz: A History of America's Music*, the latest example, and in some ways the apotheosis, of the amateur tradition. The smoothly written text of this book—the PBS version does not differ significantly, but has the advantage of some truly priceless archival film footage—consists of a modified version of the Murray-Crouch-Marsalis mythology. The complex history of jazz is further simplified by focusing on a small number of key figures, chiefly Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, and, to a lesser extent, Jelly Roll Morton, Bix Beiderbecke, Benny Goodman, Billie Holiday, Charlie Parker, and Miles Davis.

"It was our decision," Burns explains, "to follow several remarkable and emblematic stories and try to tell them well, rather than to attempt to be encyclopedic and tell none well." But this personality-driven approach, though it makes for a superficially clearer narrative, is nonetheless misleading in the extreme, so misleading that a casual reader of *Jazz* might well be forgiven for supposing that Armstrong and Ellington are the only jazz musicians of undeniable significance. Nor does it help that post-1960 developments are dealt with cursorily and for the most part unsympathetically, leaving the impression that nothing of interest happened in jazz between the death in 1967 of John Coltrane and the ascension in the 1990's of Wynton Marsalis.

More misleading still is the fact that *Jazz* contains no serious discussion of the music with which it is ostensibly concerned. Here, for example, is what Ward has to say about the radically innovative solo Beiderbecke played on his 1927 recording of "Singin' the Blues,"

[5] See my essay, "The Color of Jazz," COMMENTARY, September 1995.

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one of the three or four most influential improvisations in the entire history of jazz: "Bix's solo—bright and silvery, poised and carefully crafted—was memorized by brass players, as well." In place of musically informed analysis, Ward serves up reams of colorful anecdotage, much of it having to do with the unhappy effects of racism on black jazz musicians. The overall effect is to suggest that jazz was not so much a specifically musical development as a chapter in the history of race relations in America.

To be sure, one cannot properly tell the story of jazz without considering its cultural context. But what neither Burns nor Ward seems to understand is that, were it not for its permanent value *as music*, jazz would be a mere historical curiosity. Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington may well have been great men, but their continuing claim on our attention derives solely from the fact that they were great artists. To treat their achievements as essentially political phenomena—as, in Burns's words, "a prism through which so much of American history can be seen," and an embodiment of "our oft-neglected conscience"—is to misunderstand and misrepresent them.

If *Jazz: A History of America's Music* represents the ultimate glorification of the amateur tradition in jazz writing, there is, as I have already suggested, an alternative tradition whose early fruits were to be seen in the work of Gunther Schuller and Richard M. Sudhalter. Since then, a growing number of jazz musicians have started writing not merely memoirs but fully documented historical-analytic studies. These include the pianist Ted Gioia's *West Coast Jazz: Modern Jazz in California, 1945-1960* (1992) and Sudhalter's *Lost Chords: White Musicians and Their Contribution to Jazz, 1915-1945* (1999). At the same time, academically based scholarship has efflorescd, and is now a full-fledged branch of musicology.

For the most part—rather miraculously—the new jazz scholars have succeeded in steering clear of the political winds of academic fashion, sticking mainly to the task of unearthing, verifying, and analyzing. Such pioneering monographs as Mark Tucker's *Ellington: The Early Years* (1991) and Scott DeVeaux's *The Birth of Bebop: A Social and Musical History* (1997), while not always fully accessible to the lay reader, have nonetheless proved to be of immense value to specialists in the field. What is better, their findings are gradually beginning to shape popular critical discourse outside the universities as well.

There remains, however, the question of whether musicians and scholars can also write effectively for a general audience. One possible and heartening answer to this question is provided by the newly published *Oxford Companion to Jazz*.[6] As a contributor to this volume (I wrote the article on jazz and classical music), I am disqualified from praising its overall quality, but the originality of its *approach* is hardly a matter of opinion. Certainly no other jazz reference book to date has boasted so high a proportion of professionals among its contributors—not just scholars and critics but musicians, including the bassist Bill Crow, the trumpeters Digby Fairweather and Randy Sandke, the pianists Dick Katz and Max Morath, the lyricist Gene Lees, the saxophonist Loren Schoenberg, the arranger Jeffrey Sultanof, and the trombonist Mike Zwerin. According to the editor, Bill Kirchner, the *Oxford Companion* is intended to be useful to "anyone from novices just coming to the music for the first time to seasoned listeners who know a great deal." As a reader, I can attest to its success in this regard.

At the moment, unfortunately, *The Oxford Companion* does not have much company: books about jazz that are both musically informed and intelligible to the interested general reader remain comparatively rare. Of course, jazz scholarship is still a relatively young enterprise, and its most essential task—the creation of a fully documented, factually reliable historical record of the early years of the form—has yet to be completed. Understandably enough, most new scholars are more interested in writing for their fellow academics than in making the results of their research available to a wider audience.

It is worth remembering, too, that musical training alone is no guarantee of competence: taste can be cultivated, but it cannot be taught. And writing is another art that no longer seems to be taught to most scholars. For these reasons, there will always be a place for journalism aimed specifically at the general listener. But that does not mean it has to be monopolized by amateurs who, whatever their literary skills, rarely have anything like an adequate grasp of what goes into the making of a serious work of criticism, least of all simple factual accuracy.

With very few exceptions, the great critics of classical music have either been composers who could write (Hector Berlioz, Virgil Thomson) or professional writers with some kind of hands-on musical experience (George Bernard Shaw). While there have been several first-class classical-music biographies written by amateurs of one kind or another, I know of none written by authors altogether lacking in such experience—enthusiasts who could not read music or play an instrument. What this suggests in the case of jazz is that, instead of trying to increase the musical understanding of amateurs, it might in the long run make more sense to teach musicians and scholars how to write better. If we cannot be spared such high-profile, heavily funded embarrassments as *Jazz: A History of America's Music*, at least there will be other places to turn.

[6] Oxford, 848 pp., $49.95.

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Books in Review

The Way We Are

Human Natures:
Genes, Cultures, and
the Human Prospect
by Paul R. Ehrlich
Island. 531 pp. $29.95

Reviewed by
Francis Fukuyama

PAUL R. EHRLICH, the Stanford University biologist and environmental activist, is perhaps best known for a prediction he offered in his 1968 book, *The Population Bomb*: namely, that by the 1980's the world would be in the throes of resource scarcity severe enough to produce riots and widespread famine. This forecast became the basis of a famous public wager with the late economist Julian Simon that Ehrlich lost hands down.

Given this track record, I had little hope, prior to opening it, that Ehrlich's new book would prove more solid. Unfortunately, my doubts were justified: *Human Natures* is a highly polemical attempt to deny the existence of certain core characteristics and behaviors that constitute a single "human nature." The attempt fails.

The concept of human nature, as old as the Greeks, has been intensely politicized over the past 200 years. To many people on the Left, the very idea of such a single human nature came to seem little more than a camouflage for efforts to limit human possibilities and human freedom. By the middle of the 20th century, most social scientists had become committed to the contrary idea that human behavior was, in Emile Durkheim's phrase, "socially constructed," that is, dependent not on any biological givens but on the process of socialization. Since, moreover, human societies are almost limitless in their variety and plasticity, it follows that there are no universal standards by which one can make value judgments about different individuals or cultures. This last view is still propounded in countless "cultural studies" programs in universities around the country.

But, in one of the truly arresting shifts of intellectual history over the past five decades, the concept of human nature has undergone a remarkable resuscitation. This development has mainly occurred not in the social sciences but in the life sciences, and its sources are diverse. From evolutionary biology has come the notion that the brain is not a tabula rasa to be shaped by society but rather an organ that has adapted over time to deal with its environment and to solve certain key problems of social competition and cooperation. From behavioral genetics have come rigorous statistical methods for teasing out the genetic from the environmental components of behavior. From cognitive neuroscience have come discoveries linking behavior to the physiology and biochemistry of the brain. And then there is molecular biology, whose decoding of the human genome has begun to open up the actual digital code governing biological development.

PAUL EHRLICH's book is a reaction to these new findings. It puts for-

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ward two arguments against the existence of a single "human nature," one somewhat sophisticated and one somewhat silly.

The sophisticated argument, articulated over the years by the Harvard geneticist Richard Lewontin, holds that, because of the complex interactions between genes and environment, a given organism's genotype (i.e., its DNA) never fully determines its phenotype, the actual living creature that eventually develops. For an obvious example, consider what happens *in utero*: if a pregnant mother is malnourished, drinks excessively, or consumes drugs, the same genes will produce a child physically and mentally different from the one that would have been born if she had taken better care of herself.

This line of reasoning is unexceptionable, but it hardly settles anything. Many phenotypical possibilities are, in fact, distributed normally in the general population—if plotted on a chart, they would form a bell curve. It is true that, say, the average height of a population depends on diet, among other things, but there is still a range of identifiably normal heights, and there are dwarves and giants who can fairly be described in statistical terms as abnormal. It is also true that, in some cases, a relatively simple linear relationship obtains between environment and phenotype; the better the mother's prenatal diet, the healthier the subsequent child. Once again, however, these sorts of variance no more disprove the existence of a species-typical "nature" than they suggest that being born stunted is as desirable as being born healthy.

Ehrlich's second argument, the silly one, takes aim at a straw man. Obviously annoyed at the tendency of the popular press to speak about genes that "code for" everything from fatness to intelligence to aggression, he stresses repeatedly that human beings are, at their core, *cultural* animals, and that their behavior is heavily influenced by what they learn from both the natural and the social environment. There is a simpleminded point that Ehrlich is aiming at in asserting multiple "human natures" (to cite the title of his book): that peoples differ culturally from one another, and also that cultures change over time. Thus, at one juncture he notes that "citizens of long-standing democracies have different human natures from those accustomed to living under dictatorships," while at another he observes that "the natures of many Japanese people changed greatly in response to the defeat and the revelation of Japanese war crimes."

All this reminds one of the memorably sweeping phrase uttered by a character in one of Virginia Woolf's novels: "on or about December, 1910, human character changed." Admittedly, there has been a tendency on the part of the press and some popular science writers to hype the importance of genetics and to draw dubious links between complex higher-level behaviors and simple genetic causes. But the scientists who have sought to reestablish the legitimacy of the idea of human nature are fully aware that human beings are cultural animals, and that genes and environment interact in a complex manner. Genetics, in their view, does not produce deterministic drives or instincts but rather capabilities for cultural learning whose content is filled in after birth. The acquisition of language is perhaps the clearest example of this process.

Still, what the new biology does argue is that there are species-typical ways in which we humans learn, and there are also limits to what we *can* learn that ultimately restrict the adaptability of human behavior. Ehrlich himself provides many examples of this in his book, even as his fastidious sense of political correctness prevents him from seeing the implications of what he is saying.

Take sexual behavior—which, as Ehrlich points out, has a strong genetic component: men and women have different chromosomes and brain structures, and they also behave differently when it comes to selecting sexual partners. (According to evolutionary psychologists, that difference is traceable to their differing degrees of investment in offspring.) Although we know of no biochemical route linking the male chromosomes to promiscuity, a tremendous amount of circumstantial evidence suggests that there is such a link, including the fact there are virtually no cultures where male promiscuity is not discernible. Indeed, in our own society, 30 years after the feminist revolution, men still remain greater consumers of pornography and frequenters of prostitutes than women, and homosexual men are far more promiscuous than homosexual women. Yet after plowing through these and other facts, Ehrlich waffles for several pages before finally pronouncing the genetic evidence unproven.

Ehrlich is similarly intent on denying that there is anything innate about the human, and particularly the male, proclivity for violence, aggression, or hierarchy. Yet once again he is disputed by the data that he himself cites, including research by Frans de Waal and Richard Wrangham documenting group warfare among chimpanzees (who share a common descent with human beings from a chimp-like ancestor), or Lawrence Keeley's comprehensive survey of archaeological evidence showing that hunter-gatherer societies engage not only in warfare but in genocide. In short, Ehrlich does not merely commit the sin of selecting only the evidence that will support his conclusions; he arrives at his conclusions in the face of his own evidence.

If the bet Ehrlich lost to Julian Simon has evidently not taught him to be cautious, he is particularly thoughtless, in a manner character-

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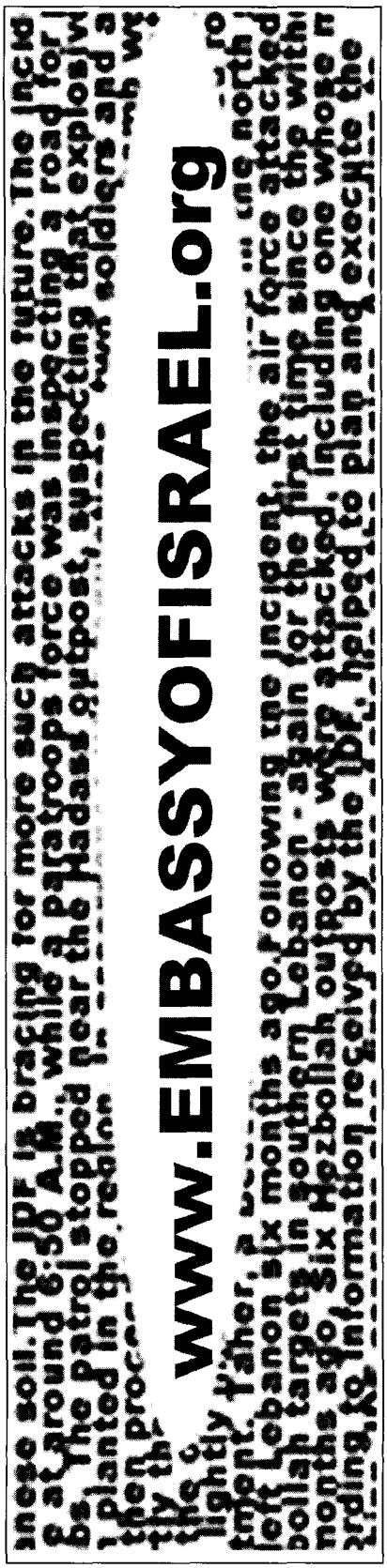

istic of many scientists, on a question central to his book: whether human nature can tell us anything relevant about human values. His answer to that question is a blunt "no."

As a man of the Left, Ehrlich is committed to universal human equality and equal respect for the world's diverse peoples. But on what grounds is this commitment based? If the "human nature" of the Japanese changed—from genocidal militarists before World War II to cooperative pacifists after it—are both Japanese "natures" entitled to equal respect? Was the U.S. wrong to wage war on the former but not on the latter? Or, again, if human natures are indeed as diverse as Ehrlich claims, why *should* we refrain from looking down upon peoples who as a group are less intelligent or less well organized or crueler than we are?

The answer, of course, lies in the fact that we all share a common humanity that consists of something more than our crude physical natures. For Christians as for Jews, human dignity lies in our having been created in the image of God. For a nonreligious person like (one assumes) Ehrlich, the only possible source of shared human dignity *must* lie in the existence not of multiple "human natures" but of a common, and single, and distinctively human nature. Although he fails to recognize it, the entire moral and political universe in which he operates depends on this proposition.

At the end of his book, Ehrlich expresses the hope that people will some day stop talking about the concept of human nature. But, thanks to developments in contemporary biology, this concept is on its way back. If he is ready to wager on whether we will still be taking it seriously in a decade or two, I would gladly accept the challenge.

Gorbomaniac

Failed Crusade:
America and the Tragedy of
Post-Communist Russia
by Stephen F. Cohen

Norton. 304 pp. $21.95

Reviewed by
Gabriel Schoenfeld

IN 1991, after seven nightmarish decades, the peoples of Russia managed to free themselves from the Bolshevik yoke. For a considerable spell after the liberation, a wave of optimism, even euphoria, prevailed in Russia and abroad. "The Russian prospect over the coming years and decades is more promising than ever before in its history," is how one longtime Russia-watcher, the journalist David Remnick, expressed the general mood back then.

Now, however, more than a decade later, there is an increasing sense that things have gone badly awry. A little more than a year ago, Boris Yeltsin staggered off the stage and handed power to Vladimir Putin, a man stamped from the mold of the KGB. Russia continues to wage a brutal on-again, off-again war within its own borders against the Chechens. The economy, we are told, is in a shambles, its only efficient sector being known as the *mafiya*. The masses are impoverished. Mortality is rising; life-expectancy declining. Nationalism is on the march.

The question increasingly before us is: what went wrong, and why? In this country, one answer that has gained currency in disparate quarters places a good part of the blame on the failed policies of the U.S. government. From the Right, a report issued this past fall by the Speaker's Advisory Group on Russia—a Republican-party body in Congress—accused the Clinton ad-

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ministration of a panoply of sins, including the failure to help Russia build "a system of free enterprise." But the Right is not alone in blaming the U.S.; the Left has its own, mirror-image form of the same indictment, whose outlines may be found in this new book.

A professor of history at New York University, Stephen F. Cohen is a columnist for the *Nation* and a consultant to CBS News. In *Failed Crusade*, he charges that what is at fault for Russia's current troubles is the very effort to export "free enterprise" in the first place. Along with an essay laying out this argument in full, Cohen brings together a number of his earlier writings to demonstrate that he saw the current calamity coming all along.

In building his case, Cohen directs a fair amount of fire against the Western press, asserting that American correspondents in particular have done a woefully inadequate job of conveying the scale and scope of Russia's downward spiral. Living for the most part in the relatively prosperous capital of Moscow, and seldom making forays into the heartland, journalists have tended to offer story after story on the novelties of post-Soviet life, like the capital's huge McDonald's—described by the *New York Times* as "[o]ne of the best seats for observing the new Russia"—while the old Russia, unobserved, crumbles all around them.

But if the press is one target of Cohen's ire, by far the more important target is Washington. The U.S., Cohen contends, has been engaged in a campaign, utterly misconceived, to transform post-Communist Russia "into some facsimile of the American democratic and capitalist system." By pushing such an instantaneous and radical transformation, and in particular by tearing down the functioning components of the old order, it has brought about a disaster of unprecedented scale and scope. In *Failed Crusade* he recounts some astonishing displays of hubris by ranking officials of the Clinton administration, whose grandiose plans for reform (see the loose talk of "reinventing" Russia emanating from the office of Vice President Al Gore) were formulated against a backdrop of obliviousness to conditions on the ground.

In all this, Cohen manages to score some points. But he falls far short of proving his broader case: namely, that America's "reckless" policy of imposing "free enterprise" on Russia precipitated a "tragedy." Indeed, for a critic of what he derides as biased and politicized scholarship, Cohen reveals some striking biases and highly politicized—and even bizarre—judgments of his own.

What appears to provoke Cohen especially in *Failed Crusade* is that Mikhail Gorbachev, the Soviet Union's last leader, was never given an adequate chance to put Soviet socialism right. This chance, in Cohen's view, was very much there for the taking, for in its final years the USSR was not the ossified oligarchy drawn in caricature by American Sovietologists clinging blindly to cold-war categories; rather, it "turned out to be remarkably reformable." With Gorbachev at the helm, moreover, it was being guided by "the greatest reformer in Russian history." Though he faced enormous obstacles in bringing about change—not least, the obstacles placed in his path by the bellicose policies of the Reagan administration—in the end,

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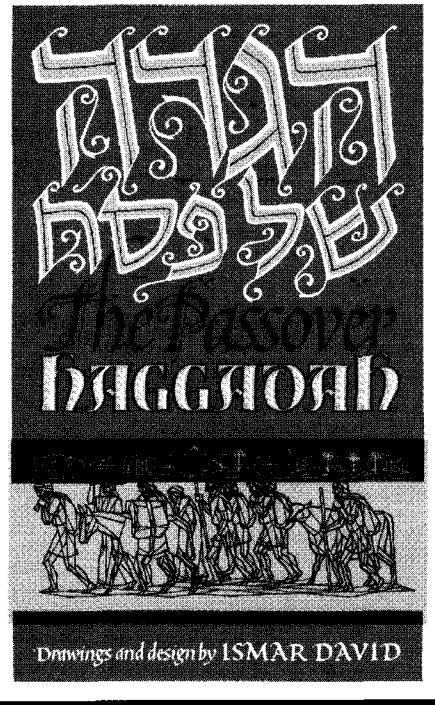

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the Soviet Union under Gorbachev's tenure did not so much "'collapse' as it was disassembled by a small group of ranking Soviet officials, Yeltsin among them."

Then, Cohen's analysis continues, these officials, with American encouragement, undertook a program of "shock therapy" that brought unprecedented hardship to the Russian people. Among other things, they dismantled some of the key building blocks of a healthy socialism: their policies "deprived workers of whatever rights and protection they had in the Soviet system"; they "decimated" the "large, highly educated, and potentially entrepreneurial Soviet middle classes"; and they eliminated "hard-won welfare entitlements" complete with "cradle-to-grave benefits."

These and other policies, Cohen concludes, brought about a "degradation of agriculture and livestock herds even worse in some respects than occurred during Stalin's catastrophic collectivization of the peasantry in the 1930's." They also produced "more new orphans than resulted from Russia's almost 30 million casualties in World War II." In short, Russia's post-Communist leaders—again at the active urging and with the collaboration of the United States—inflicted greater harm in various realms than even the Soviet system at its most brutal.

DOES ANY of this correspond with reality? In assessing Cohen's current views, it may be worth remembering that he has a long track record as a Soviet analyst and prognosticator. It is not altogether a pretty one.

Cohen first made an impression with his 1975 biography of Nikolai Bukharin (1888-1938), the Soviet politburo member who championed Lenin's market-based New Economic Policy in the 1920's. *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, though a substantial and generally well-received work, offered more than a few clues about the direction in which Cohen was to head over the course of his career. For a basic premise of the biography was that the Stalinist tyranny of the 1930's was an aberration. If Bukharin had come to power in place of Stalin, a very different brand of Communist government would have emerged: instead of despotism and terror, Russia would have been able to enjoy the fruits of the more humane brand of socialism represented by Lenin and Leninism, of which Bukharin was (in Cohen's telling) the legitimate continuator.

To believe this, of course, is to believe much about Lenin himself that is, to say the least, debatable. In fact, a far more persuasive case can be made that Stalinism itself was the logical extension of Leninist rule and not a perversion of it. Bukharin, in any case, died in a Stalinist purge, and whatever possibility he held out was never put to the historical test. His biographer, however, never gave up on that possibility, or on the thought that, somehow, under the right leader, Soviet Communism could yet escape from its "deformations" and return to the true path of Leninist-style socialism.

In the 1950's and 60's, Nikita Khrushchev offered such a hope: this Soviet leader, according to Cohen (writing in the *Nation*), initiated a revival of "long-dormant socialist commitments in Soviet ideology: equality, abundance, efficiency, and justice." And when, after another brutal interlude of two decades, Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in 1985, the "alternative historical model of socialism initiated by Lenin and elaborated by Bukharin" seemed to have found a champion once again.

Cohen's affinity for Gorbachev was put on regular display in the 1980's. As Soviet politics suddenly became turbulent, he began to appear often on television and in print explaining internal Russian developments and frequently castigating the Reagan administration for its unaccommodating stance toward Moscow. Though he occasionally exhibited a keen insight into the machinations of high Soviet politics, he also revealed a disturbing tendency to echo Kremlin propaganda themes—sometimes almost verbatim. Thus, in one of his many columns in the *Nation*, Cohen went so far as to attribute Reagan's hardline policies not only to the pressures brought to bear by the American "military-industrial complex" and "legions of professional cold-warriors" but also to "certain Jewish organizations." For each of these groups, explained Cohen in quasi-Marxist terms, "[a]ny acknowledged improvement in the Soviet system threatens their political, economic, and ideological well-being."

Cohen's assessment of the long-term health of the Soviet system of rule during its final years was exceedingly upbeat. The Reagan ad-

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ministration's efforts to compel change were "doomed," he wrote in another column, "because they are predicated on wildly exaggerated conceptions of Soviet domestic problems. In reality, the Soviet Union is not in economic crisis; nor is it politically unstable." Though, in *Failed Crusade*, Cohen reprints a good many of his earlier writings, this noteworthy piece of analysis is unaccountably not among them.

Speaking of "wildly exaggerated conceptions," however, we may now return to Cohen's current apocalypticism. Conditions in Russia these days are assuredly bad, and in some respects getting worse—although there have also been areas of remarkable progress that should not be downplayed or ignored. But however one assesses Russia's current troubles, little in them justifies the catalog of horrors presented in *Failed Crusade*—as fantastical in its way as Cohen's listing of such glorious accomplishments of Soviet Communism as its "hard-won welfare entitlements."

The "cradle-to-grave benefits" that Cohen rates so highly were, as everybody but he now acknowledges, almost entirely of the "grave" variety, extending from mass murder under Lenin and Stalin to the systematic underinvestment in health care that left a stamp on Russian mortality rates still in evidence today. If post-Communist Russia has descended into a woeful condition, it is thanks less to the very real flaws of U.S. policy, or even to the very real shortcomings of Boris Yeltsin, than to the enormous and near-insuperable difficulty of recovering from the massive trauma inflicted by seven decades of Bolshevik rule. No amount of dreaming about the belligerent Reagan and the wonderful Gorbachev will alter that simple reality.

Critic at Large

The Moral Obligation to Be Intelligent: Selected Essays by Lionel Trilling

Edited and with an Introduction by Leon Wieseltier

Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 576 pp. $35.00

Reviewed by
Michael Kimmage

The critic Lionel Trilling spent his entire career as a professor of literature at Columbia University. Born in 1905, he is often remembered as the first Jew to get tenure in an Ivy League English department, but his ambitions ranged well beyond academic success. By the 1950's, he had established himself as America's preeminent cultural critic, and had done so in a way that managed to combine the engagement of the intellectual with the distance of the scholar.

Never a political advocate, Trilling was nevertheless the subject of controversy from the 1950's on. Attacked from the Left by, among diverse others, Irving Howe and C. Wright Mills as an apologist for the conservative tendencies of the 1950's, Trilling was among the most searching proponents of what came to be known as liberal anti-Communism. His argument with the American Left began with an admiring 1939 study of Matthew Arnold, the Victorian poet and essayist, continued with his only novel, *The Middle of the Journey* (1947), and culminated in the varied essays on literature and culture that he wrote in the late 1940's and 1950's. But if, for radicals like Howe and Mills, Trilling's writing was tainted by an aura of bourgeois respectability, for liberals he was an often subversive critic of liberalism, while for

Michael Kimmage, *here making his first appearance in* Commentary, *is a doctoral student at Harvard in American studies.*

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conservatives he was too noncommittal in his critique of radicalism.

Nor has the problem of Trilling's political status receded with time. In the 1960's he wrote probingly of an emerging "adversary culture," and when Columbia erupted in student protests in 1968, Trilling found himself an object of contempt among student radicals. In the 1970's, his obliquely antiprogressive views were challenged by a younger generation of academic critics assertively committed to the ideals Trilling had been questioning since the 1930's. The Anglophilic Trilling was also accused of being insufficiently Jewish, or too mired in the Anglo-Saxon and Continental canon. These disputes have continued in the years since his death in 1975.

Trilling did not change his critical views or his politics to appease the Zeitgeist. But neither did he devote himself to self-defense. Mostly, he stood aloof.

THE COMPLICATED mind of Lionel Trilling is once again on display in *The Moral Obligation to Be Intelligent*—an anthology of essays that begins in 1938 and ends in 1975. The book is edited and introduced by Leon Wieseltier, who was an undergraduate student of Trilling's at Columbia and is now the literary editor of the *New Republic*. The well-selected essays convey the scope and flexibility of Trilling's mind: interspersed among considerations of Henry James, Jane Austen, William Dean Howells, and John Keats are his thoughts on the political sensibility of George Orwell and T.S. Eliot, as well as a prescient review of the Kinsey Report, which Trilling interpreted in 1948 as a key document of a sexual revolution in progress.

The substance of Trilling's criticism is inseparable from his style. His essays, difficult to read and almost impossible to read superficially, are allusive and challenging at their best, at worst vague and heavy. His most unsettling device is the arresting pronoun, "we," which recurs throughout and serves a dual function, denoting what "we," the liberal elite, probably think while at the same time quietly urging what "we," as critical members of this elite, *should* think. Although rooted in a particular tradition, the "we" of his essays is in perpetual tension with received opinion, a voice criticizing culture from within that culture.

Thus, in an early two-part essay, "Reality in America," Trilling focused on the literary historian Vernon Parrington, in whose three-volume work, *Main Currents in American Thought* (1927-30), only progressives triumphed and a conservative writer like Nathaniel Hawthorne was denied the benefit of intellectual sympathy. Such, for Trilling, was the faulty "logic of liberal criticism," a logic that—moving now beyond the example of Parrington—he also found in the adoring reception awarded by left-leaning critics of his own day to the realist novels of Theodore Dreiser. In Trilling's view, this excessive praise entailed a criminal neglect of Dreiser's literary shortcomings, which no amount of proletarian detail or progressive sympathy could obscure. "We" championed Dreiser, in other words, to the detriment of "our" culture.

A later essay, "On the Teaching of Modern Literature" (1961), follows a similar pattern of detecting a cultural tendency and questioning its merits. At issue here was not the proletarian literature so dear to the 1930's but the modernist movement in Western culture. In particular, Trilling associated modernism with the dark philosophical meditations of Nietzsche and with a body of literature that equated modern life with spiritual emptiness. In the line that runs from Tolstoy to Nietzsche to T.S. Eliot, Trilling saw both an anguished reflection on human alienation and an unsettling negation of bourgeois truths.

But to these rather standard insights he added a singular irony. As a professor, Trilling was *teaching* modernism, thereby helping to institutionalize the alienation it expressed. The tortured verities of the great modernist writers came back to him in the form of term-paper platitudes, as if America's educated middle class had not only internalized but grown comfortable with the most radical possible critique of itself. Although Trilling did not propose excluding modernist literature from the curriculum, neither could he bring himself to endorse its inclusion without reservation.

This essay foreshadowed Trilling's quarrel with the 60's New Left. Indeed, he saw himself as in some sense responsible for the 1968 uprisings at Columbia or at least for the vocabulary his students had absorbed from the modernist heritage of alienation. Last year's term paper had become this year's slogan, and the "adversary culture" had become something of a mass movement. In his opposition to all this—he was, in Wieseltier's formulation, "the most forceful (and the most wry) adversary of the adversary culture"—Trilling seemed to be stepping outside the Left.

But this did not make him a man of the Right. However influential Trilling's thinking and writing would be for the neoconservative movement then forming, he himself never wished to be a part of it. His student Norman Podhoretz, who had first moved to the left of Trilling in the early 1960's, taking COMMENTARY with him, moved to the Right of him later in that decade, breaking decisively with the Left and then working out an explicitly conservative position. In his own writing Podhoretz has retained the distinctive mix of the classic Trilling essay, blending political, literary, and cultural analysis, but he has renounced the Trilling "we," the voice and conscience of the liberal elite, for a more particular "we": enthusiastically conservative, pro-American, and Jewish. This was a step that Trilling did not care to take.

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The appendix to *The Moral Obligation to Be Intelligent* includes a short essay, "Under Forty." The title is taken from a symposium in the *Contemporary Jewish Record*, the forerunner to Commentary, in which Trilling participated with others of the "younger generation of American Jews" who had been asked to reflect on their place in American life and letters. Trilling identified himself there as a Jew, writing that "in what I might call my life as a citizen my being Jewish exists as a point of honor." But he declined the label of a Jewish intellectual or a Jewish writer. The rest of the volume bears out this self-assessment. There is "Wordsworth and the Rabbis" (1950), which begins with a description of Trilling's own Jewish education and then proceeds to discuss Wordsworth's mysticism by reference to the moral imagination of the rabbinic tradition. Another essay, on the Russian-Jewish writer Isaac Babel, also touches on Jewish themes, most notably the admiration of Jewish intellectuals for the man of action.*

But nothing in this anthology contradicts Trilling's observation in "Under Forty" that "I do not have it in mind by my writing to serve any Jewish purpose" or his distant attitude toward American Jews, "now one of the most self-indulgent and self-admiring groups it is possible to imagine." In one respect, "Under Forty" is impressively candid; Trilling flatters neither himself nor America's Jewish community. In another respect it is a chilly piece of writing, palpably so when one notices that it was published in—of all years—1944.

Wieseltier's short introduction places Trilling in an ecumenical context. Although he mentions his "polemic against the undiscomfited progressivism of the 1930's and 1940's," and deems Trilling "a distinguished enemy of his time," Wieseltier does not attempt to situate him in the culture wars that began in the 1960's and have continued to rage long after his death. If Wieseltier neglects a fascinating history, he does succeed in presenting Trilling as Trilling himself might have wished: a teacher rather than an ideologue. And as this book testifies, the provocative ambiguities of Trilling's essays have not lost any of their pedagogic power.

* Not included in this volume are any of the essays on Jewish themes Trilling wrote in the late 20's and early 30's for *The Menorah Journal*. One of these, "The Changing Myth of the Jew" (1931), set in type but never published, appeared in Commentary after his death (August 1978).

Stockholm Syndrome

The Nobel Prize:
A History of Genius,
Controversy, and Prestige
by Burton Feldman
Arcade. 489 pp. $29.95

Reviewed by
Jonathan Marks

In his 1895 will, Alfred Nobel, a Swedish industrialist who made his fortune by inventing and selling dynamite, left to posterity a sizable prize fund, stipulating that it be used each year to recognize those individuals "who shall have contributed most materially to benefit mankind." Today, the Nobel Prize is the most prestigious and coveted award in the world. It is the undisputed arbiter of greatness in physics, chemistry, physiology or medicine, literature, and peace—the five fields specified by Nobel—as well as in economics, which was added in 1968. Winners earn not just a gold medal and a great sum of money—more than $900,000 last year—but also a considerable measure of intellectual and moral authority. "The awards seem almost to issue not from mere Stockholm," Burton Feldman writes in his engaging and comprehensive history, "but from some timeless Realm of Objective Judgment."

Feldman, a professor of English recently retired from the University of Denver, celebrates the genuinely outstanding achievements that the Nobel Prize has so often served to recognize. But he is wary of the award's unparalleled influence—and its carefully cultivated image of critical rigor. As he ably demonstrates, considerations other than mere excellence have long played a role in the bestowal of the world's most sought-after laurel.

It is not easy to explain the success of the Nobel Prize. The Templeton Prize for progress in religion is more lucrative, and the Fields Medal in mathematics, awarded just once every four years, is harder to win. Moreover, the institutions that administer Nobel's legacy—three Swedish academies and the Norwegian parliament—are not otherwise thought to possess any special competence in discerning the heights of human achievement.

What, then, accounts for the prize's prestige? Feldman gives much of the credit to the grand ambitions of Nobel himself, who wished to honor excellence without regard to national or disciplinary boundaries. Against the balkanizing tendencies of the modern intellectual world, Nobel established "the first important regular prize to include not only the arts and sciences, but also politics in the form of 'peace.'" Nor has it hurt that during this century of astonishing scientific progress, the prize's recipients for chemistry, physics, and physiology constitute a "steady procession of greatness," from Marie Curie, Albert Einstein, and Werner Heisenberg to James Watson and Francis Crick.

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Nonetheless, Feldman shows, the Nobel's track record is far from unblemished, even in the vaunted picks for science. During the prize's early years, for instance, the kingmaker on both the physics and chemistry juries was Svante Arrhenius, the most famous scientist in Sweden. He backed the physical chemists in their turf war against organic chemists and helped shut geo- and astrophysics out of serious prize consideration. Such prejudices have diminished, but even so, neither the astronomer Edwin Hubble, whose observations provided evidence for the expansion of the universe, nor the geologist Alfred Wegener, who proposed the theory of continental drift, ever won the prize. In addition to oversights like these, there have been several questionable recipients, like Maurice Wilkins, who shared the 1962 prize with Watson and Crick despite having contributed little to uncovering the structure of DNA. He was included, Feldman reports, because of the behind-the-scenes maneuvering of a previous laureate who considered Wilkins the victim of "frightfully bad luck."

WHATEVER THE shortcomings of the science prizes, however, worse by far have been the selections for literature. Over the years the Nobel juries have ignored, among many others, Leo Tolstoy, Henrik Ibsen, Mark Twain, Marcel Proust, Henry James, Thomas Hardy, Joseph Conrad, James Joyce, and Robert Frost. Such injustices, Feldman insists, cannot be blamed on a surfeit of deserving writers. In 1901, the first year of the prize, Tolstoy's greatness was widely recognized; yet the award went to Sully Prudhomme, "as forgettable a poet as can be found in the Nobel's long list of mediocrities."

The trouble, in Feldman's view, is that the Swedish academy responsible for the literature prize has never been able to transcend its own cultural prejudices. In the early years of the prize, when those biases were "spiritualized and conservative," Tolstoy was dismissed for his "abhorrent" religious sympathies, Ibsen for his "highly adventurous" views on "ethical-sexual questions," and Hardy for portraying a God Who lacked "any sense of justice or mercy." More recently, as Feldman is hardly the first to observe, the outlook of the jurors has been "politicized and liberal."

In 1967, the Guatemalan novelist Miguel Angel Asturias may not have been the best writer of his day, but he was, as his Nobel citation explained, an ardent foe of tyranny, slavery, injustice, and the American trusts—which no doubt explains why he had been awarded the USSR's Lenin Peace Prize just a year earlier. Or consider the 1997 laureate, Dario Fo, a kind of postmodern performance artist who arguably was not engaged in literature at all but whose candidacy did have one inestimable advantage: the Catholic Church objected to his work, and the Italian authorities had tried, albeit unsuccessfully, to prosecute him.

No wonder, Feldman writes, that the "world's most prestigious literary award has become widely seen as a political one—a peace prize in literary disguise." But as for that peace prize itself, Feldman finds little to criticize. True, Nobel's explicit intention to recognize strictly international good deeds has given way since 1960 to an emphasis on "efforts for peace within a nation." But this, in Feldman's estimation, has been a bold and revitalizing step, resulting in the recognition of such courageous worthies as Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Dalai Lama.

INDEED, LOOKING at the Nobel enterprise as a whole, Feldman believes that it is "healthier" now than at any time in its 100-year history. Whatever the flaws of the prizes, he concludes, "they make us a bit more open to or reverent of greatness." But is that true?

The problem is not just that several of the awards have become subservient to politics, though Feldman might have said a great deal more about the influence of racial and ethnic concerns on the literature prize in recent decades and the transformation of the peace prize into an endorsement of the liberal cause du jour, even when that cause has been embodied by such dubious heroes as Mikhail Gorbachev and, worse, Yasir Arafat. The more serious charge against the awards for peace and literature alike is that they have seemingly given up on the idea that excellence forges its own criterion, independent of ideology or political fashion. In this respect, the prizes do not "make us a bit more . . . reverent of greatness"; they make us a lot more cynical. Nothing could be farther from the intentions of Alfred Nobel, which have been traduced to a greater extent than Feldman cares to admit.

Created Equal?

A New Birth of Freedom: Abraham Lincoln and the Coming of the Civil War
by Harry V. Jaffa
Rowman & Littlefield. 549 pp. $35.00

Reviewed by
Richard Brookhiser

MOST POPULAR books on the Civil War are military histories, colorful narratives that too often descend into the pornography of bloodshed. Academic historians, by contrast, treat the period according to the prevailing fashions of their discipline, which these days run to social history with a strong dose of racial politics. (At a recent dinner party, a historian who is

RICHARD BROOKHISER, *a senior editor at* National Review, *is the author, most recently, of* Alexander Hamilton, American.

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working on a biography of Harriet Tubman grimaced when I told her I was reviewing a book about so fusty a topic as Abraham Lincoln.)

For more than 40 years now, Harry V. Jaffa has provided a much-needed antidote to both these tendencies in Civil War historiography. A professor emeritus of government at Claremont McKenna College, he has focused not only on the era's leading political figures but on their publicly stated *views*—that is, what they said, and their reasons for saying it. In his best-known book, *The Crisis of the House Divided* (1958), Jaffa analyzed the seminal debates over slavery between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas in the 1858 race for the Senate in Illinois. His latest book, *A New Birth of Freedom*, is the long-awaited sequel, filling in more of the political background of the Civil War and carrying the story up to the first battle of Bull Run in the summer of 1861.

The book is organized around four of Lincoln's great antagonists: two who laid the groundwork for Southern secession and two who actually brought it about. The earliest of these foes was John C. Calhoun (1782-1850), whom Jaffa calls the "philosopher-king" of the South. A formidable Senator from South Carolina and the author of two major theoretical works on American government and the Constitution, Calhoun sought to replace the scheme of checks and balances outlined in *The Federalist* with a new guarantee of minority rights: the "concurrent majority," which would grant to large, compact minority groups—like the South—a veto power over any proposal that affected their interests. In the ferocious dispute over the tariff during the Jackson administration, Calhoun's proposed veto took the form of "nullification"—the supposed right of a state to defy federal laws it deemed onerous. By the end of his life, with the political power of the South threatened by an increasingly populous North, the interest dearest to Calhoun's heart was slavery, and the ultimate form of his veto became the threat of secession.

Jaffa also sets out the arguments of Roger Taney (1777-1864), who as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court wrote the infamous 1857 decision in *Dred Scott*, which greatly encouraged Southern radicals. Ruling that Dred Scott, a slave who had been taken to territory where slavery was prohibited, had to be returned to bondage, Taney asserted that the Declaration of Independence, with its claim that "all men are created equal," had not been intended to "embrace . . . the enslaved African race." If it had, he suggested, Jefferson and his peers would have freed their own slaves.

As for the actual leaders of secession, they too offered novel justifications for their cause. Jefferson Davis (1808-1889), the future president of the Confederacy, gave a speech in 1859 outlining a theology of slavery. Referring to the passage from Genesis in which Noah curses his son Ham while blessing his sons Shem and Japheth, Davis said that in it "the Creator" had "declared the destiny of the three races of men." Blacks, being the hapless "race of Ham," were thus doomed to enslavement by the divine scheme of things. As Jaffa comments, "One hardly knows whether to laugh or weep" at this crude fundamentalism, but "before laughing, one must remember that hundreds of thousands of men . . . met violent deaths because of it."

More surprising perhaps are the modern-sounding arguments advanced by Alexander Stephens (1812-1883), the vice president of the Confederacy. Setting out the principles of the new Southern government early in 1861, Stephens acknowledged that the American founders considered slavery a "violation of the laws of nature." But, he added, they were wrong to do so, lacking as they did the more up-to-date knowledge of the 19th century. The "great truth that the Negro is not equal to the white man," Stephens declared, "has been slow in the process of its development, like all other truths in the various departments of science." But, as with the principles discovered by Galileo and William Harvey, which were initially met with skepticism, this one too would eventually win "universal acknowledgment."

Jaffa hardly leaves these arguments unanswered. Against Taney's ruling in *Dred Scott*, for instance, he cites the statements of numerous members of the founding generation and their immediate successors, all of whom described slavery as an existing evil that, in time, would draw to an end. Indeed, one such statement unearthed by Jaffa comes from an 1818 trial in Maryland in which a prominent local attorney argued that slavery "is a blot on our national character, and every real lover of freedom confidently hopes that it will [be] wiped away." The name of the lawyer? Roger Taney, speaking decades before his effort to rewrite the country's moral history.

But the central chapters of *A New Birth of Freedom* are devoted not to Jaffa's but to Abraham Lincoln's responses to the assorted theories of the South's partisans. As Lincoln saw it, the nation's practices had to be tested against the principles of the Declaration of Independence. This was not just because the Declaration was integral to American history, but because the fundamental equality it describes—and attributes to natural law—was essential to the very idea of free government.

The catch, as Lincoln knew, was that free men had to come to this conclusion on their own. As Jaffa summarizes his view, those who enjoy rights need to appreciate

> that their own rights depend upon recognizing the equal rights of others. But they must be made to understand this. It cannot be imposed upon them. . . . Among the paradoxes of the American founding is that it is based upon philosophic wisdom

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while denying to philosophers, or to anyone else, the right to rule without the consent of the governed.

Thus it was that, as a political candidate and as President-elect, Lincoln pledged not to touch slavery in states where it already existed. Slave-owners themselves would have to do away with the institution. Lincoln was determined, however, to keep slavery out of the vast Western territories—at that time, more than a third of the continental United States. And he was equally determined to argue that slavery was unambiguously wrong.

JAFFA'S EXPLORATION of these themes is not just of historical interest. Slavery still flourishes in parts of Africa, unsteady democracies exist on almost every continent, and ideas of equality in the United States today are often based on misinformed and antidemocratic paradigms of group rights, evidenced most strikingly in Bill Clinton's unsuccessful nomination to the Justice Department of Lani Guinier, a candid admirer of John C. Calhoun's notion of a concurrent majority. Jaffa himself argues that the modern Supreme Court, in its reluctance to endorse the idea of natural law, has grasped the essence and significance of the Declaration of Independence no better than did Roger Taney.

In view of its great interest and relevance, it is all the more unfortunate that *A New Birth of Freedom* is such a forbidding book, its many brilliant passages alternating with dense and repetitious ones. It seems that Jaffa has been so long in the maze of his own thoughts on these weighty issues that he has forgotten where the entrance is. Aristotle said a plot should have a beginning, middle, and end; *A New Birth of Freedom* has dozens of each.

To this criticism Jaffa would probably reply that he is simply extending to his readers the same courtesy he extends to his subjects, which is to treat serious matters seriously, and to leave no implication unpursued. There may be some justice in that. It is certainly true that readers with the stamina to surmount the difficulties of this book will be rewarded with a lifetime's worth of profound reflection on the problems and possibilities of constitutional government.

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Dumbing Down the Public: Why It Matters

Diane Ravitch is a research professor, New York University; distinguished visiting fellow, Hoover Institution; and member, Hoover's Koret Task Force on K–12 Education.

On several occasions, I have found myself in a familiar dialogue. When I complain about low expectations in the schools, my opposite number says, "So what? Our economy is doing well, we win the lion's share of Nobel Prizes, and we have enough qualified people to fill our most demanding professions." In other words, even if a third of our youngsters are not learning the most elementary skills in school, even if a third of our college freshmen must get remediation on campus, there's no cause for concern.

Behind this disagreement are two different assumptions: I assume that our education system should aim to educate everyone who comes to school; the other side says that ability is distributed along a bell-shaped curve and that we should not be overly concerned about the laggards because we will always need people to pick up the trash and sweep the streets. I confess that I get confused at this point because the current argument favoring low or no standards is coming from people who claim to be on the left.

Some evidence recently surfaced, which suggests that **a democratic society pays a price for widespread ignorance.** The *Princeton Review,* best known for its test preparation services, analyzed the vocabulary used by the presidential candidates in the campaign debates of 2000 and compared it to the vocabulary levels used in earlier campaign debates.

The *Princeton Review* obtained transcripts of the Gore-Bush debates, the Clinton-Bush-Perot debate of 1992, the Kennedy-Nixon debate of 1960, and the Lincoln-Douglas debate of 1858. It analyzed these transcripts using a standard vocabulary test that indicates the minimum educational level needed for a reader to understand a document. This test is ordinarily used to evaluate textbooks and other educational materials.

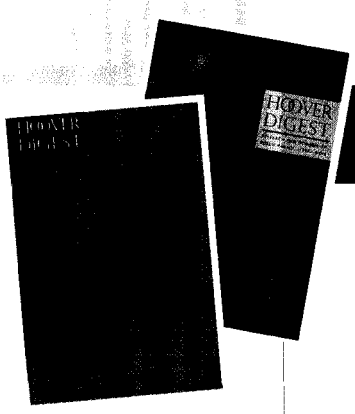
The results? In the debates of 2000, George W. Bush spoke at a sixth-grade level (6.7); Al Gore spoke at a high seventh-grade level (7.9). In 1992, challenger Bill Clinton scored in the seventh grade (7.6), President George Bush in the sixth grade (6.8), and Ross Perot at a sixth-grade level (6.3).

Our contemporary politicians, who found it necessary to speak to us as sixth and seventh graders, compared unfavorably with Kennedy and Nixon, both of whom spoke in a vocabulary appropriate for tenth graders. And they, in turn, looked sophomoric when compared to Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas, whose scores, respectively, were 11.2 and 12.0.

Is it the candidates who have dumbed down their appeals or are they simply acknowledging that the public has a limited vocabulary? Candidates for public office, it is clear, must tailor their arguments to what the public can understand. Even though most Americans have completed at least twelve years of education, our candidates for president know that they cannot use big or unusual words when they address the voting public. This is what happens in a society that tolerates low expectations in our schools.

— Diane Ravitch

Paid for by the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.



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